THE LETTERS OF MARSILIO FICINO

Volume I

The bust of Marsilio Ficino in Florence Cathedral. He is thought to be holding his translation of the works of Plato in the manner of a lyre, an instrument which he is said to have played superbly.

The Letters of
MARSILIO FICINO

Translated from the Latin by members of the Language
Department of the School of Economic Science, London

VOLUME I

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Publisher's Note:

The beehive motif shown on the title page appears on a number of Ficino manuscripts which were illuminated for Lorenzo de' Medici's library.

This book has been set in Monotype Bembo 270. The Bembo typeface was first used by Aldus Manutius Romanus in Venice in 1495 for a small tract by the young humanist poet Pietro Bembo (later Cardinal, and secretary to Pope Leo X). Pietro was the son of Bernardo Bembo, the recipient of letters 94, 97 and 123 in this volume.

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Letter Titles

In primum librum proœmium
Preface to the first book of letters

1 De fœlicitatis desiderio
On the desire for happiness

2 Quae sit ad fœlicitatem via
The way to happiness

3 Imitatio utilior est quam lectio
Imitation is more useful than reading

4 Dialogus inter Deum et animam theologicus
A theological dialogue between God and the soul

5 Medicina corpus, musica spiritum, theologia animum curat
Medicine heals the body, music the spirit, and theology the soul

6 Lex et iustitia
Law and justice

7 De divino furore
On divine frenzy

8 Excusatio prolixitatis
An excuse for prolixity

9 De divinatione et divinitate animae
On divination and the divinity of the soul

10 Modus laudis absque adulatione
How to praise without flattering

11 Solitariae vitae utilitas
The usefulness of the solitary life

12 De modestia componendi
On modesty in writing

13 De laude Platonicorum interpretum
In praise of those who expound Plato

14 Exhortatio ad scientiam
An exhortation to pursue knowledge

15 Consolatio in alicuius obitu
Consolation on someone's death

16 Laus veritatis
Praise of truth

17 Quantum utile sit alere doctos
How useful it is to maintain scholars

18 Laus opificis non a verbis, sed ab opere
Praise of an artist does not arise from his words, but his work

19 De virtutibus civilibus purgatoriis, purgati animi exemplaribus
On the civil virtues, the purgatorial virtues and the model virtues of the purified soul

20 De sapiente et fœlice viro
On the wise and fortunate man

21 Bona scribere praestat quam multa
It is better to write good things than many things

22 Exhortatio ad scientiam
An exhortation to pursue knowledge

23 Invitatio ad scribendum
A request for a letter

24 Gratiarum actio
Giving thanks

25 Amatoria
Matters of love

26 Mirabilium auctor Deus est, non homo
God, not man, is the author of wonders

27 Laudes Laurentii Medicis mirae
The astonishing glories of Lorenzo de' Medici

28 Amatoria
Matters of love

29 Amatoria; quomodo amandus quisque sit et quomodo laudandus
Matters of love; how each man should be loved and how praised

30 Iocosa ad Ioannem invitatio ad reditum, per dissimulationem
A playful inducement to Giovanni to return, by means of dissimulation

31 Epistola genialis de heroibus
A letter about heroes written as the spirit moved

32 Quod gratis fit, gratius est, quam quod ex debito
What is done freely is more pleasing than an act of obligation

33 Provocatio ad scribendum
A challenge to write

34 Quod necessariae epistolae inter amicos
Letters are necessary between friends

35 Gravis est iactura temporis
Loss of time is a serious matter

36 Quod iocundae amicorum literae
Friends' letters are a source of joy

37 Nemini detrahendum, quia Deus ulciscitur
No one should be disparaged, because God brings vengeance

38 Homo est animus. Amantis animus est in amato
Man is spirit. The spirit of the lover is in the beloved

39 Seria ad Ioannem. Anima post mortem intelligit, et multo clarius, quam in corpore
Serious words to Giovanni. The soul perceives after death, and much more clearly than when in the body

40 Contra Averroem, scilicet, quod non sit unicus hominum intellectus
Against Averroes, on the grounds that there is not a single human intellect

41 Theologi vigilant, caeteri somniant
Theologians are awake; the rest dream

42 Veritas Dei splendor, pulchritudo, amor
The truth of God is splendour, beauty and love

43 Ideae secundum Platonem in divina mente sunt
Ideas, according to Plato, exist in the divine mind

44 Causa peccandi, spes, remedium
The cause of sinning; hope; the remedy

45 Quos Deus coniunxit moribus, coniunget fœlicitate
Whom God has joined together in a way of life, he will join in happiness

46 Praestantior est legum conditor, quam sophista
The law giver is superior to the sophist

47 Legitimus amoris terminus est consuetudo
The lawful end of love is union

48 Neque amor sine religione, neque religio sine amore laudatur
Love is not praised without religion, nor religion praised without love

49 De tolleranda iniuria
On bearing injury

50 De constantia adversus fortunam comparanda
On constancy in the face of fortune

51 Amicitia illa stabilis, quae a Deo conflatur
A friendship is lasting which is forged by God

52 Poeticus furor a Deo est
Poetic frenzy is from God

53 Cura patriae, familiae, amicorum
Care for country, family and friends

54 Quis sit verus vir appellandus
Who ought to be called a true man

55 De humanitate
On humanity

56 Gratia, amor, fides, amicitia
Grace, love, faith, friendship

57 Stultitia et miseria hominum
The folly and misery of men

58 Stultitia et miseria hominum
The folly and misery of men

59 Stultitia miseriaque hominum
The folly and misery of men

60 Exhortatio ad modestiam et studia literarum
An encouragement to modesty and the study of literature

61 Quod amicus est in amico
That a friend is within a friend

62 Salus amici ab amico
The health of a friend depends on his friend

63 Divinatio de amico
A prophecy concerning a friend

64 Quantum possit desiderium amicorum
How great the longing of friends can be

65 Laudare praestat benevolentiam, quam ingenium
It is better to praise benevolence than genius

66 Quos amor fallat, quos non fallat
Whom love deceives, whom it does not deceive

67 Commendatio ab egestate et dignitate
A commendation from need and merit

68 Cum bene omnia regantur a Deo, omnia in melius accipienda
Since all things are well governed by God, all things should be accepted for the best

69 De stultitia hominum, et quae sit vera scientia
On the stupidity of men, and what true knowledge is

70 Liberalitatis laus, eleemosinae laus
Praise of generosity, praise of almsgiving

71 Nulla virtus benignitate amabilior
No virtue is more lovable than kindness

72 Verus amicus non eget absentia, ut magis desideretur
A true friend does not need to be absent to be more desired

73 Quis dives iniustus sit, quis iustus
The rich man who is unjust, and the one who is just

74 Iurisconsulti bonitas et dignitas
The goodness and dignity of the lawyer

75 Dignitas sacerdotis
The dignity of the priest

76 Non cuilibet dandi sunt sacri ordines
Holy orders are not to be given to anyone

77 Nulla consonantia magis delectat, quam cordis et linguae
No harmony gives greater delight than that of heart and tongue

78 De officio civis
On the duty of a citizen

79 Quid est bene vivere
What it is to live well

80 Vota non sunt spernenda
Prayers are not to be despised

81 Nobilitas, utilitas et usus medicinae
The nobility, usefulness and practice of medicine

82 Tempus parce expendendum
Time ought to be used sparingly

83 Homo sine religione bestiis est infœlicior
Man without religion is unhappier than beasts

84 Responsio ad epistolam de tempore parce expendendo
Reply to the letter about the sparing use of time

85 Nemini recte volenti omnino ad bonum interclusus est aditus
Access to the good is wholly barred to no one of right will

86 Imitatio potior est quam lectio
Imitation is more powerful than reading

87 Durate, et vosmet rebus servate secundis
Endure, and keep yourself from secondary things

88 Divinitas animi ab inventione
Divinity of soul from invention

89 Novum opus nimium placet opifici
A new work pleases the author too much

90 De perseverantia
On perseverance

91 Prudentis est nihil praeter salutem animi bonamque corporis valetudinem exoptare
It is the nature of a prudent man to desire nothing beyond the welfare of his soul and a healthy body

92 De musica
On music

93 Verissima laus est, quae laude digna est
The truest praise is that which is worthy of praise

94 Fœliciter amatur qui a viro amatur amore dignissimo
He is fortunately loved who is loved by a man most worthy of love

95 De lege et iustitia
On law and justice

96 De anima
On the soul

97 Consolatio in amici obitu
Consolation on the death of a friend

98 Legitimi iurisconsulti partes
The role of the true man of law

99 Velociter comparatur quod ardenter desideratur
What is ardently desired is swiftly obtained

100 Fontes potius quam rivulos sectari debemus
We should pursue sources rather than streams

101 Peripateticus non ut philosophus est, pecuniam appetit, sed ut homo
A follower of Aristotle does not seek money as a philosopher, but as a human being

102 Commendatio a fortuna quondam fœlici, innocentia, scientia
A commendation from former good fortune, innocence and knowledge

103 Qua ratione sit quisque laudandus
The reason for praising someone

104 Nemo sine amore, de amore bene loquitur
Without love no one speaks well of love

105 Praecepta ad memoriam
Precepts for memory

106 Virtutum definitio, officium, finis
The definition, function and end of the virtues

107 Animae natura et officium, laus historiae
The nature and duty of the soul; the praise of history

108 Tres vitae duces, et una vitae optima ratio
Three guides for life and the one best principle for living

109 Ratio docendi, laudandi, vituperandi
The principle of teaching, praising and blaming

110 Cognitio et reverentia sui ipsius omnium optima
Knowledge and reverence of oneself are best of all

111 De divinitate animi ac religione
On the divinity of the soul and on religion

112 Consolatio in alicuius obitu
Consolation on someone's death

113 Contra mendaces et impios detractores
Against liars and impious slanderers

114 Contra mendaces et impios detractores
Against liars and impious slanderers

115 Quid est fœlicitas, quod habet gradus, quod est aeterna
What happiness is; that it has degrees; that it is eternal

116 Oratio ad Deum theologica
A theological prayer to God

117 Quod soli virtuti Deoque confidendum et serviendum
That one should trust and serve only virtue and God

118 Qualis debeat esse imitatio
Of what nature imitation should be

119 Saepe magna est laus quae brevis est
Often great praise is brief

120 Qui favet bonis sibi favet
He who shows favour to good men shows favour to himself

121 Quae sit petitio et commendatio iusta
A fair request and commendation

122 Institutio et admonitio brevis episcopi
Brief instruction and advice to a bishop

123 Laus Philosophiae oratoria, moralis, dialectica, theologica
Oratorical, moral, dialectical and theological praise of Philosophy

124 Gratia iubelei
The grace of a jubilee

125 Gratiarum actio
Giving thanks

126 Ociosae vitae utilitas
The usefulness of the leisured life

127 De perseverantia
On perseverance

128 Solus divinus medicus curare morbos animi potest
Only the divine physician is able to cure the ills of the soul

129 Vicissitudo amoris unde nascitur
Whence the reciprocity of love is born

130 Vera poesis a Deo ad Deum
True poetry is from God and for God

131 Sua mittenda sunt ad suos
What is a man's own should be sent to his own

Preface

THE work of Marsilio Ficino, the head of the Platonic Academy of Florence, was never quite forgotten, and it has aroused, ever since the beginnings of this century, a continuing interest which seems to have increased and expanded in recent years. This interest is due to a variety of reasons. As a philosopher, Ficino forms an important link in a metaphysical tradition that extends at least from Plato to Hegel and that has not yet run its course or lost its appeal. Moreover, as a translator of Plato, Plotinus and other ancient thinkers, Ficino has attracted many readers who would otherwise not have been drawn to his independent writings. As a religious thinker who does not insist on points of dogma he has benefitted, not unlike Erasmus, from the present climate of religious tolerance and universalism. When many people seek the truth in Eastern beliefs, often ill-understood, at least some will be sympathetic to a genuine Western tradition to which Ficino and his Neoplatonic predecessors belong and which stresses the life of contemplation. His doctrine of Platonic love inspired many writers and poets, his allegories and metaphors many artists, and his theories of poetry, of music and of the visual arts were taken up and developed by many critics. Having lived in early Renaissance Florence and conversed and corresponded with many distinguished friends, at home and in the rest of Italy and of Europe, he rightly shares the fascination which that period and milieu has exercised on historians and laymen alike. He thus appeals to us, not only through the style and content of his writing and thought, but also through his associations, his sources and his influence.

Modern interest in Ficino has found expression in many monographs and articles published in several languages, and in a number of reprints and editions of his works. His commentary on Plato's *Symposium* and a few short pieces are available in English, and English translations of other Plato commentaries, of the *Platonic Theology* and of the *De vita* are now being prepared. A translation of his letters fills a definite desideratum, and it is to be hoped that the present volume which contains the first book of the *Epistolae* will in due time be followed by others.

The Letters occupy in fact a very important place in Ficino's work. As historical documents, they give us a vivid picture of his personal relations with his friends and pupils, and of his own literary and scholarly activities. As pieces of literature, edited and collected by himself, the letters take their place among other correspondences of the time and are a monument of humanistic scholarship and literature. Finally, the letters are conscious vehicles of moral and philosophical teaching and often reach the dimensions of a short treatise. This intention is made explicit in the title attached to each letter which is due to the author himself and not to a later editor.

Ficino began to collect his letters in the 1470's, gradually arranged them in twelve books, had them circulated in numerous manuscripts copies, and finally had them printed in

1495. The first book contains letters written between 1457 and 1476, and its manuscript tradition is especially rich and complicated. These letters derive great interest from the time of their composition, for they were written at the same time as some of the commentaries on Plato and as the *Platonic Theology*, Ficino's chief philosophical work. The correspondents include many persons of great significance: Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici, and members of other prominent Florentine families, allied or hostile to the Medici at different times: Albizzi and Pazzi, Soderini and Rucellai, Salviati and Bandini, Del Nero, Benci and Canigiani, Niccolini, Martelli and Minerbetti. There are two cardinals, Francesco Piccolomini, the later Pius III, a famous patron and bibliophile, and Bessarion, the great defender of Platonism. There is Bernardo Bembo, Venetian patrician and ambassador, Giovanni Antonio Campano, bishop and humanist, Francesco Marescalchi in Ferrara, and Giovanni Aurelio Augurelli from Rimini. There are the friends of Ficino's youth, Michele Mercati and Antonio Morali called Serafico, and his favorite friend, Giovanni Cavalcanti. There are philosophers and physicians, and there are numerous scholars, of different generations, who occupy a more or less prominent place in the annals of literature and learning: Matteo Palmieri and Donato Acciaiuoli, Benedetto Accolti, Bartolomeo Scala and Niccolò Michelozzi, all connected with the chancery, Cristoforo Landino, Bartolomeo della Fonte and Angelo Poliziano, Francesco da Castiglione, perhaps Ficino's teacher of Greek, and Antonio degli Agli, bishop of Fiesole and Volterra, Jacopo Bracciolini the son of Poggio, and Carlo Marsuppini, the son of the humanist chancellor of the same name, Benedetto Colucci and Lorenzo Lippi, Domenico Galletti and Francesco Tedaldi, Antonio Calderini and Andrea Cambini, Cherubino Quarquagli and Baccio Ugolini, known for their vernacular verse, and a number of Latin poets: Peregrino Agli, Alessandro Braccesi, Amerigo Corsini, Naldo Naldi and Antonio Pellotti. The book also includes several pieces that are important compositions in their own right: the dialogue between God and the soul (4), on divine frenzy (7), on humanity (55), on the folly and misery of man (57–59), on the use of time (82), on law and justice (95), on happiness (115), the theological prayer to God (116), and the praise of philosophy (123).

The translators have pursued their task with enthusiasm, and if I may judge from the sections I examined, successfully. In the absence of a critical edition, they have not relied on the 1576 edition of Ficino's works which has been recently reprinted and offers a rather corrupt text, but on the first edition of 1495, and have collated one or two of the better manuscripts, at least for some of the difficult passages. I have encouraged them to follow accuracy as their chief goal, though not at the price of clumsy style.

The translation will not replace the orginal Latin text for scholarly purposes—no translation ever does and, in view of present attitudes, this simple truth cannot be repeated often enough. Yet the translation will be useful for all scholars working with the text, for it will clarify obscure passages and often correct the readings found in the most accessible editions. Above all, the translation will make available to students and lay readers an important document of Renaissance thought and literature that would otherwise not be accessible to them, and thus enrich their taste, their knowledge and their outlook.

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Paul Oskar Kristeller

Introduction

Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), the Florentine, was a man who wrought a deep and lasting change in European society. From him and his Academy the Renaissance drew its most potent intellectual and spiritual inspiration. To Ficino the writings of Plato and his followers contained the key to the most important knowledge for Man: knowledge of himself, that is, knowledge of the divine and immortal principle within him.[1] Not only does this knowledge appear from his letters to have been actual experience for Ficino, but he possessed the magic to make faith in this principle a living ideal for his age.

He was apparently one of the least active of men. It is probable that in his sixty-six years he never set foot outside the territory of Florence and the record of his life is little more than the chronicle of his books. And yet, associated with his Academy and under his immediate influence was the most conspicuously brilliant group of men ever to have assembled in modern Europe. These were the men who embodied the Renaissance—Lorenzo de' Medici, Alberti, Poliziano, Landino, Pico della Mirandola. Directly inspired by Ficino were the great Renaissance artists, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Dürer, and many others. Professor Kristeller has said that the whole intellectual life of Florence in his time was under his influence.[2]

It is hard to capture or define the elusive quality of spirit that not only bound so many great men in Florence to Ficino, but attracted to him, both in person and by correspondence, leading statesmen, scholars and churchmen from all over Europe. Indeed the site of Ficino's Academy at Careggi became a place of pilgrimage both during his life and after his death. The letters provide four main clues: first, the love which he extended to all who approached him; second, the wisdom which enabled him to see so clearly into the nature of his correspondents and to touch on those points which could lead them to make the best use of their talents;[3] third, he seemed to understand clearly how the various activities of his correspondents related to the divine principle in Man and also to their function in the State; fourth, the letters have a quality of timelessness, so that Ficino seems to be speaking to us as clearly today as he spoke to his contemporaries in 15th century Florence. Almost absent from them are accounts of the disappointments and satisfactions resulting from physical events, which render most letters out of date immediately they have been written. He was a true man of the spirit; largely independent of the 'blows of fortune' upon the body,[4] he imparted tranquillity and strength, like his own, to those who listened to him. For instance, a meeting of writers who were assembled to discuss a

crusade against the Turks had become exceedingly doleful. At the time, the apparently invincible Turks were a serious threat to Europe. Ficino picked up his lyre and by his music immediately gave back to the company its confidence and strength.[5]

Ficino seemed to understand the principles of every art and to embody in himself the Renaissance ideal of the complete man. He was first of all philosopher, but he was also scholar, doctor, musician and priest. As scholar, apart from his original works, he translated into Latin the whole of Plato and many of the classical writings in the same tradition. This he did at amazing speed and so well that his translations remained the standard editions until those published in national languages in the 19th century. As a doctor his skill was such that many, including the Medici, preferred to call upon his services before any other's. In the tradition of Hippocrates he never took a fee.[6] As a musician his main object was to arouse devotion, and in this his contemporaries recognised him as extraordinarily effective. Singing his Orphic Hymns to the lyre, Ficino enthralled Bishop Campano who was travelling through Florence. In a letter Campano says it was 'as if curly-headed Apollo took up the lyre of Marsilio and fell victim to his own song. Frenzy arises. His eyes catch fire . . . and he discovers music which he never learnt.'[7]

To Ficino the visual arts were of especial importance. Their function was to remind the soul of its origin in the divine world by creating through art, resemblances to that world. It was largely through Ficino's insistence on the importance of this art that the painter's position in Florentine society was raised nearer to that of the poet than that of the carpenter, where it had previously been. The image of painting is Ficino's most frequent metaphor. He was himself on close terms with the Pollaiuolo brothers and closely directed the painting of Botticelli's *Primavera*. In the *Platonic Theology* he describes the first impulse in the creation of a painting. He writes: 'The whole field appeared in a single moment to Apelles and aroused in him the desire to paint.'[8]

Ficino became a priest in 1473 and later a Canon of Florence Cathedral. The priesthood was to him the highest function of all, 'standing in God's place, performing his work among men'.[9] When he himself preached in the Cathedral, Corsi tells us that people flocked to hear him speak and were delighted by his sermons on the gospels.[10] He was not afraid to write to the leaders of religious orders[11] and once to the Pope himself,[12] urging them to fulfil their responsibilities, at a time when corruption in the church was general. Ficino also wrote to lawyers, rhetoricians and others. He wrote so authoritatively because he related all the activities to the central aim of Man: to return to his divine source.

It is not surprising that even in Florence, the centre of so many men of genius, Ficino should have been selected as tutor to Lorenzo de' Medici, who became the effective ruler of Florence in 1469 in succession to his father, Piero, and grandfather, Cosimo. Lorenzo was a man of great versatility, the outstanding statesman and Italian poet of his day. He was a life-long friend of Ficino, though perhaps never more so than during the period covered by these letters. He also remained devoted to the Academy and Platonic philosophy, which he practised as a statesman and celebrated as a poet.

The meetings at the Academy must have been the main means by which Ficino taught philosophy to its illustrious members. Rich though they are, the 131 letters in this volume, many to bare acquaintances, can only give a faint reflection of the discussions that must have taken place within its walls, among men of such stature. They were a spiritual community bound together by a common bond of love to each other and to Ficino.[13] He was their centre and they were the centre of the Renaissance.

Cosimo de' Medici had resolved to establish a Platonic Academy in 1439, and Ficino writes that he was selected to run it when he was still only a boy.[14] Cosimo had been moved to this decision by the arrival in Italy of Gemistos Plethon, who had come with the Greek Emperor and Patriarch to discuss at the Council of Florence a proposed union of the Greek and Roman Churches. Plethon was so steeped in the philosophy of Plato that he seemed to contemporaries like another embodiment of the great philosopher. However, it was not until 1462 that Cosimo gave Ficino the villa at Careggi, which became the headquarters of the Academy. It was situated on the southern slopes of Montevecchio and overlooked the Medici villa a kilometre away.

Ficino wrote to Lorenzo in 1474[15] that he should take care of his health, as without Lorenzo neither his country nor the Academy could prosper. In this he was prophetic, for shortly after Lorenzo's death (1492) and the expulsion of his son Piero, the activities of the Academy were greatly reduced,[16] although it continued into the 16th century under Francescoda Diaceto.

Ficino was born at Figline in the Val d'Arno on October 19th, 1433. His father, Diotifeci, was doctor to Cosimo de' Medici. Of his mother, Alessandra, we know little except that she was much respected by Ficino and appears to have had the gift of 'second sight'. She lived to an advanced age, dying only a year or so before Ficino. In later life Ficino lived with and cared for both his parents.

Little is known about his education except the names of his early teachers and that he studied under the Aristotelian, Niccolo Tignosi, at Florence University. It is not certain when Ficino first became attracted to the writings of Plato. But since Cosimo de' Medici had had an enthusiastic interest in Plato, at least since 1439, and Ficino writes that he had discussed philosophy fruitfully with Cosimo (who died in 1464) for more than twelve years,[17] it must have been at least since 1452. Late in learning Greek, he had at first to rely on Latin authors, and the few dialogues available in translation, for his knowledge of Plato. His first work (1456), the *Platonic Institutions* (now lost) was based on these sources; and after he read it, Cosimo told him not to publish anything until he could read Greek.[18] However, the letter in this volume on 'Divine Frenzy',[19] composed the following year, shows the authority and power with which he was already writing.

St. Antoninus,[20] the Archbishop of Florence and Chancellor of the University, whom Ficino greatly respected, advised him at about this time to study less Plato and more St. Thomas Aquinas. He may well have studied more of the latter, of whom he gained considerable knowledge, but his enthusiasm for the Platonic tradition in no way diminished.

By 1462 he was already producing his first Latin translations of Greek authors, which included the *Hymns* of Orpheus and the *Sayings* of Zoroaster. The following year he completed a translation of the Hermetic writings, which subsequently became his most frequently published work.[21] He then resumed the translation of Plato's dialogues, which he finished by 1469. He was afflicted with illness and 'deep melancholy' in 1468, and was then advised by his 'unique friend' Giovanni Cavalcanti to cure himself by writing a dialogue on love[22]; this is his commentary on Plato's *Symposium, De Amore*. In this work he explains how creation is brought into being, sustained and again gathered to its source through the flow of love. This movement was illustrated by the role of the Graces in Renaissance art.

In the following year Ficino began *The Platonic Theology* or *The Immortality of Souls*. This was his major work. It extended to eighteen books and occupied him for the next

five years. In proving the immortality of the soul he showed the single source and unity of two fundamental elements in the life of Western civilisation; Judaic-Christian religion and Greek philosophy.[23]

Ficino became a priest in 1473, and in the same year began *The Christian Religion*. This work emphasises, in addition to the divinity of Man's soul, the personal relationship between Man and God, so beautifully expressed in letter 4. In this book he writes of Man:

> Let him revere himself as an image of the Divine God. Let him hope to ascend again to God, as soon as the Divine Majesty deigns in some way to descend to him. Let him love God with all his heart, so as to transform himself into Him, who through singular love wonderfully transformed Himself into Man (*Opera Omnia*, pp. 22–23).

Numerous short treatises followed *The Christian Religion*. From about 1484 to 1492 he was engaged in translating and commenting upon the philosopher Plotinus (204–270 A.D.), and his successors, Porphyry and Proclus. In 1489 he published the medical and astrological work *The Three Books on Life*, and in 1492 he completed his translation of Dionysius.[24] Ficino had his letters published in 1495. In 1496 his commentaries on Plato were printed and in 1497 his translation of Iamblichus; his last extant work is an unfinished commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

Giovanni Corsi, Ficino's early 16th-century biographer, describes his appearance and character[25]: 'He was short in stature, slim, and slightly hunched in both shoulders. He was a little hesitant in speech, and stammered in pronouncing the letter "S". On the other hand he was not without grace; his legs, arms and hands being well proportioned. The set of his countenance gave him a mild and gracious appearance. He was ruddy in complexion and his wavy golden hair curled high over his forehead.'

According to Corsi, Ficino's health was generally poor, although it improved after his forty-fifth year. He says that although Ficino was gay in company he was melancholy when alone. This melancholy 'he burned up by unremitting work at night'. In temperament, 'he was mild, although when moved by bile, he sometimes broke out into swift anger, which like a lightning flash quickly disappeared. He readily forgot an injury. He was never forgetful of his own duties. He was not at all inclined to sensual passion, but he was rapt in love, just like Socrates, and used to converse and debate with the young about love in the Socratic manner. Throughout his life he was content to have few clothes and household possessions. He had fine but not extravagant taste, for all indulgence was fundamentally foreign to him. He attended carefully to the necessities of life; although sparing with food, he obtained the most excellent wines.'

To Ficino, discipline was essential to the spiritual life. Following the example of Pythagoras, he was a vegetarian who encouraged his followers not to eat cooked food, and throughout the year to rise with the sun, or an hour or two earlier.[26] He led a life of abstinence and chastity, the importance of which he explained in a long letter in Book VIII.[27] Yet although he believed in discipline, his mind soared beyond dogma. There could be many roads to the source even though the Christian one was the best. He writes in *The Christian Religion*: 'Divine Providence does not permit any part of the world at any time to be completely without religion, although it does allow rites to differ. Perhaps variety of this kind is intended . . . God prefers to be worshipped in any manner, however unfittingly . . . than not to be worshipped at all through pride.'[28]

Not far below the surface, in many of his letters, is his sense of humour.[29] Take, for

example, his letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, recommending him to support the Aristotelian philosopher, Oliviero Arduini.[30] He grants that Lorenzo may query whether such a philosopher should ask for financial help but begs that he should give the money first and raise the query afterwards.

Ficino's Academy awoke Europe to the deep significance of the Platonic tradition. His letters to eminent correspondents all over the continent contributed directly to this awakening. They included Colet (Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and founder of St. Paul's School) in England. He wrote to de Ganay, Chancellor of the Parlement in France; to the humanist Reuchlin in Germany (about the meaning of the Orphic hymns). King Matthias of Hungary invited him to his court to give personal instruction in Platonic philosophy; an appointment which he declined but a function which he filled through his follower, Francesco Bandini, who resided with the King for several years. Towards the end of his life, he was able to write, even if partly humorously, that by his correspondence he 'held all Europe in amatorial servitude'.[31]

Ficino was not the first to revive the study of Plato and his followers. This had developed with the rediscovery of antiquity, which had begun at the time of Dante, or earlier, and had increased in scope and depth with the growing knowledge of Greek and the accumulation of new classical manuscripts. He was not the first to show that Judaic religion and Greek philosophy had a single source, stretching back as he saw it to Moses, Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus, the sage of Ancient Egypt.[32] But more than anyone else he established the equal authority of these two strands of European tradition; he convinced his contemporaries that 'lawful philosophy is no different from true religion; and lawful religion no different from true philosophy'.[33] The most eloquent monument to his influence is the mosaic of Hermes Trismegistus in Siena Cathedral.

It was Ficino more than anyone who took from Plato, Plotinus and the Hermetic writings the concept that part of the individual soul was immortal and divine, a concept that was all-important to the Renaissance.[34] For, from this, it followed that the soul had power 'to become all things' and that Man could 'create the heavens and what is in them himself, if he could obtain the tools and the heavenly material'.[35]

In a sense this became the philosophy of the age, for in the century or so following Ficino's birth, more progress was made in the arts and sciences than in the previous millenium, while the voyages of discovery to America, to Southern Africa and the East mirrored the inward achievements in art and literature. Already Europe was on the threshold of the scientific age of which the inventions of Leonardo and the discoveries of Galileo,[36] and later Kepler, were early fruits.

Ficino's 'discovery' of the immortality of the soul was particularly important in the revival of religion during the next century. In the Middle Ages it was a doctrine that had been rather neglected by Christian theologians. Through Ficino it again became central to Christian thought.[37] He carried the greater conviction because he gave every sign of having experienced in contemplation what he described in his writing. A study of contemporary documents will show what a frequent subject for reflection the immortality of the soul became, and by decree of the Lateran Council in 1512 it was made for the first time part of the dogma of the Catholic Church. This emphasis on the individual soul led easily to the devotional step of a 'personal relationship' with God which became so characteristic of the reformers both within and outside the Catholic Church.

For Ficino the immortality and divinity of the soul was the basis of 'the dignity of Man', which the artists and writers of the Renaissance sought to express in countless ways. In time the expression of this ideal touched every aspect of life. Throughout Europe elegance became the object of riches. As the nobility moved out of their castles, they moved into houses that began to express the grace, proportion and light of the Renaissance.[38] The forbidding towers and narrow streets which dominated many mediaeval Italian towns gave way to spaciousness and order. Today the harmony of a Georgian farmhouse as well as the stately homes of Europe still recall to us the 'birth of beauty' in the 15th century.

The dignity of Man was not only reflected in architecture and art but had to be expressed in every field of human activity. A new ideal for Man was set, the first and best model for which was Ficino's pupil, Lorenzo de' Medici. Noble, magnanimous, courageous, completely trustworthy, he could turn from war and affairs of state to philosophy, scholarship, poetry, music or art, and excel in each. Equally at ease with his peers or his people, his authority sprang from his nature and not from his position.

The 'courtier' who was successful without effort and impressive without ostentation, both in the arts and the traditional pursuits of war and hunting, was a marked contrast to the more limited noble of an earlier age. The change in character required is well illustrated by the 16th century Castiglione in *The Courtier*.[39] He describes a man whom a lady 'had honoured by asking him to dance, and who not only refused, but would not listen to music or take part in the many other entertainments offered, protesting all the while that such frivolities were not his business. And when at length the lady asked what his business was, he answered with a scowl: "Fighting." "Well then," the lady retorted, "I should think that since you aren't at war at the moment and you are not engaged in fighting, it would be a good thing if you were to have yourself well greased and stowed away in a cupboard with all your fighting equipment, so that you avoid getting rustier than you are already." '

The new 'courtier' became a model that was not confined to the noble class. This was the character that, for centuries, the English public schools endeavoured to build and it became almost the definition of a gentleman all over Europe. It required a more generous education than the somewhat restricted view of the seven liberal arts current in the Middle Ages. A knowledge of ancient literature and history became the unquestioned basis of education[40] in the West and remained so until very recently.

The original impulse of the Renaissance, that the glory of Man should be reflected in all his activities, became in time a movement of general refinement, which lasted for centuries, affecting the taste and manners of the entire population of Europe. The improvement in manners meant more than learning to use a fork or how to make polite conversation. It was the adoption of a code of conduct by which consideration for others became a custom of society. In origin it was the reflection of 'Man's dignity' in his social behaviour.

What is the significance of Ficino's letters today? For a society which seems to have lost its direction; which is largely dominated by indolence, greed, violence and corruption, they have a contemporary ring. It was to the same problems that Ficino addressed himself in the 15th century. The letters remind us that these vices are the product of foolishness and ignorance and that the fulfilment of Man lies in return to his source.

NOTES ON THE INTRODUCTION

1 Plato, *Timaeus*, 41. *Phaedrus*, 245c–246a. Letters 110, 111.
2 P. O. Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, ch. 3.
3 See especially letters 7 and 122.
4 Letter 50.
5 See R. Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, p. 396, quoted from B. Colucci, *Declamationes*.
6 G. Corsi, *Life of Ficino*, ed. Marcel, XVIII–XIX, p. 687.
7 A. Della Torre, *Storia della Accademia Platonica*, p. 791, quoted from G. A. Campano, *Epistolario*, ed. Mencken, Leipzig, 1707.
8 *Platonic Theology*, III, I, *Opera Omnia*, p. 118: ed. Marcel, Vol. I, p. 135.
9 Letter 75.
10 G. Corsi, XI, ed. Marcel, p. 684.
11 Appendix I.
12 *Opera Omnia*, p. 808.
13 P. O. Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, ch. 3.
14 *Opera Omnia*, p. 1537.
15 Letter 26.
16 A. Della Torre, *Storia della Accademia Platonica*, p. 831 *seq.*
17 Letter 86.
18 *Opera Omnia*, p. 929.
19 Letter 7.
20 P. O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, p. 204.
21 The *Hymns* of Orpheus, the *Sayings* of Zoroaster and the Hermetic writings are considered by modern scholars to be works of late antiquity, although possibly based on earlier sources.
22 G. Corsi, VIII, ed. Marcel, p. 683.
23 See D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, Introduction.
24 For the importance of the writings ascribed to Dionysius, the Areopagite, see D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, Introduction.
25 G. Corsi, XV–XVI, ed. Marcel, pp. 685–6.
26 A. Della Torre, p. 633.
27 *Opera Omnia*, p. 875.
28 *The Christian Religion*, ch. IV, *Opera Omnia*, p. 4.
29 See letter 39 for Ficino's view of humour in Plato.
30 Letter 101.
31 *Opera Omnia*, p. 891.
32 See the Argumentum to Ficino's translation of the *Pimander*, *Opera Omnia*, p. 1836.
33 Letter 123.
34 See P. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man*, ch. 2.
35 Letter 123.
36 For a comparison between the thought of Ficino and Galileo, Pico and Kepler, see P. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man*, p. 20.
37 Ibid., ch. 2, p. 30 *seq.*
38 See letter 47.
39 B. Castiglione, *The Courtier*, ed. Penguin Classics, p. 58. This work was also the first of many in European literature to portray Ficino's notion of a purely spiritual love between friends (as described in letter 51) as extending between members of the opposite sex.
40 For Ficino's views on the revival of education see, *Opera Omnia*, p. 944.

Translators' Note

FICINO's twelve books of letters were first printed in Venice in 1495. This translation covers only the first book; correspondence between 1457 and 1476. Ficino probably started to collect his philosophic letters for publication towards the end of 1473. In a letter to Angelo Poliziano in the present volume (letter 21) he mentions a volume of 'philosophic letters' among his works. This consisted of the first 120 letters in the present volume, which he collected, dedicated to Giuliano de' Medici, and circulated among his friends (a common practice amongst scholars at that time). He may have been prompted to start this collection by the fact that letters falsely purporting to be his were being circulated (see letter 16).

The printed version of the first book of letters was translated into Italian during Ficino's lifetime, very possibly by Ficino himself (see bibliography). All twelve books were translated into Italian by Figliucci in the 16th century.

Very few of Ficino's letters, or indeed his other works, have been translated into English (exceptions have been listed in the bibliography). This translation has been based on the manuscript (Ricc. 797) in the Riccardiana Library in Florence. Although there are some twenty manuscripts of the first book of letters in existence, this comparatively late one is acknowledged to be amongst the most accurate.

The Venice edition was followed by editions published in Florence and Nuremburg, and Ficino's *Opera Omnia*, containing all those works then known, was published in Basle in 1561 and 1576. The latter was reprinted by the 'Bottega d'Erasmo' in Turin in 1959. Since this is the most generally accessible edition, the translators have followed it for the ordering of the letters. The order of the letters in the Riccardiana manuscript is in any case very similar.

For the dating of the letters the Riccardiana manuscript has been followed.

Footnotes, References, Biographical Notes

THE great majority of the notes have been placed at the back of the book. They consist firstly of notes on individual letters which mainly detail the sources on which Ficino drew. These are keyed by numerical indices in the text, thus: [2]. Secondly, there are biographical notes on Ficino's correspondents and other contemporaries mentioned in the letters; these are listed in alphabetical order on pp. 221–33. These notes do not cover all his correspondents since in some cases nothing is known beyond what may be gathered from the letters themselves.

There are also footnotes to the letters. These consist firstly of points where the Riccardiana manuscript (see Translators' Note) varies from the Basle edition. These are keyed by numerical indices thus: [1]. In each case the first and last Latin words in the footnote are common to the Basle edition and the manuscript, while the words between are the manuscript variant. The presence of only two words in the footnote indicates the omission of a word in the manuscript that is present in the Basle edition.

There are further footnotes which give the Latin, not because of textual discrepancy but because the translators have thought it might be of particular interest to readers. These notes have been keyed alphabetically thus: [a].

Where translations are used in the notes to the letters, they are taken from the following sources: for the dialogues of Plato, from Jowett's version, Oxford, 1892; for the Orphic Hymns the Greek text of E. Abel; *Orphica*, Leipzig, 1885 (reprint in Hildesheim, 1971), and the English translation of T. Taylor first published in 1787, reprinted in *T. Taylor the Platonist, Selected Writings*, ed. K. Raine & G. M. Harper, London, 1969.

The Letters

Marsilii Ficini Florentini in epistolas suas, scilicet in primum librum ad Iulianem Medicem, Virum Magnanimum Proœmium

The preface of Marsilio Ficino, the Florentine, to his first book of letters addressed to the magnanimous Giuliano de' Medici

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Giuliano de' Medici: greetings.

MAGNANIMOUS GIULIANO: the great Cosimo, your grandfather and my[1] patron, often spoke these words of Plato: that in undertaking important affairs, nothing is more profitable than the good-will of prudent and learned men.[1] And there is no clearer evidence of justice and prudence in such affairs than if friends of this kind are present; nor of injustice and imprudence than if they are absent. This is the golden rule of Plato. Cosimo throughout the whole of his life proved it by what he did, much more than by what he said. He was certainly an exceptionally wealthy man; rich in money, far richer in men and most rich in prudence and justice. And what is most rare and wonderful, he left a son and grandchildren who inherit this treasure. So it is that in my Giuliano[2] I recognise that old man, on whom alone, after God, my welfare totally depended.

There is therefore nobody whom I desire to be in better health than Giuliano; and indeed I pray and beseech God for this every day. And to declare to you more clearly my desire and intent, I have resolved that the first volume of my letters to my friends should be dedicated to you, who are the prince among them. I have done this in order that all my friends may be related to one principal friend; and so that when you are reading them, each time you read the greeting you will know that Marsilio greets Giuliano.

[1] ms patronus meus, saepe
[2] ms ut in Iuliano

I

De fœlicitatis desiderio

On the desire for happiness

Cosimo de' Medici to Marsilio Ficino: greetings.

YESTERDAY I went to my estate at Careggi, but for the sake of cultivating my mind and not the estate. Come to us, Marsilio, as soon as possible. Bring with you Plato's book on *The Highest Good*,[1] which I suppose you have translated from Greek into Latin as you promised. I want nothing more wholeheartedly than to know which way leads most surely to happiness.

Farewell. Come, and bring your Orphic lyre with you.

2

Quae sit ad fœlicitatem via[1]

The way to happiness

Marsilio Ficino to Cosimo de' Medici: greetings.

I SHALL come to you as quickly as I can, most willingly. What could be pleasanter than to be in Careggi, the land of the Graces,[2] talking with Cosimo, the father of the Graces. Meanwhile, please accept in these few words what the Platonists say about the most convenient way to happiness. Although I do not think it is necessary to show the way to a man who has already nearly reached the goal, I think your desire must be obeyed, in your absence as well as your presence. All men want to act well, which is to live well. But they live well if they are endowed with as many good things as possible. Now these good things are said to be riches, health,

beauty, strength, nobility of birth, honours, power, prudence, as well as justice, fortitude and temperance, and above all else wisdom, which indeed comprehends the whole essence of happiness. For happiness consists in the successful achievement of the desired goal, but wisdom does this for every activity.

Thus skilled flautists get the best out of their instruments, and learned grammarians best understand what relates to reading and writing. Wise helmsmen also reach a good harbour in their voyage before others do, and the wise general conducts warfare with least danger. The wise doctor can best restore the body's health. Thus with all her strength wisdom gives us mastery of every human activity according to our desire. She never wavers, nor is she ever led astray; otherwise, in truth, she would not be wisdom. Since wisdom is the cause of attaining the goal, necessarily she is all-powerful where happiness is concerned.

It is also said that only they are happy who are endowed with many gifts. But they are not happy before those gifts benefit them, and they never benefit from them unless they use them. Possession without use does not contribute to happiness. Nor is use alone enough; for[1] one can use them badly, and thus be injured rather than helped. So as we have added use to possession, we must add rightfulness to use, for we must not only use our gifts but we must use them rightly. Wisdom alone ensures that we do so. This one can see in the arts, in which only those who are skilled in their art make right use of their material, no less than they do of their tools. So also, wisdom makes sure that we rightly use riches, health, beauty, strength, and the other things which are called good. For this reason knowledge is the cause of good and successful action, in the possession, use and working of every gift. The man who possesses many gifts and uses them without intelligence is injured the more, the more[2] he possesses, since he has more to misuse. Certainly, the less someone does who is ignorant[3] the fewer mistakes does he make. The fewer mistakes he makes, the less is the harm he does. The less harm he does the less[4] miserable is he. Certainly he does less if he is poor than if he is rich, if he is weak than if he is strong, if he is timid rather than bold, if he is sluggish rather than alert, slow rather than quick, dull rather than clever. Thus none of those qualities which above were called good are good in themselves, for if they are

[1] ms potest enim quis
[2] ms magis quanto possidet plura pluribus ut abutitur
[3] ms abutitur. Sane insipiens
[4] ms agens minus est

dominated by ignorance they are worse than their opposites, in so far as they can plentifully supply the means of crime to an evil leader. If, on the other hand, prudence and wisdom govern these qualities, then they are so much the better. Thus they are not good or bad in themselves. To the wise man both advantages and difficulties become useful, because he makes good use of them both; but the opposite applies to the ignorant.

Of everything that is ours, wisdom alone is good in itself. Only ignorance is bad in itself. Since therefore we all wish to be happy, and happiness cannot be obtained without the right use of our gifts, and since knowledge reveals their proper use, we should leave all else aside and strive with the full support of philosophy[5] and religion to become as wise as possible. For thus our soul becomes most like to God, who is wisdom itself. In this likeness, according to Plato, consists the highest state of happiness.

[5] ms Philosophiae tum

3

Imitatio utilior est quam lectio

Imitation is more useful than reading

Marsilio Ficino to the noble Amerigo Benci: greetings.

TODAY I received from you the dialogues of our Plato, in Greek; certainly a magnificent gift, worthy of your spirit[a] and most pleasing to mine. I send you many thanks. May[1] the heavenly Graces soon visit you with their immortal favour.

You wished, I think, to imitate the great Cosimo in this as in most other things, for in earlier days he enriched my library with Plato's works in Greek. I praise your gift, Amerigo, and approve the imitation, for imitation is a surer way to virtue than reading. Just[1] as harmony has a more

[1] ms magnas. Utinam immortalem

[a] animo

powerful effect when actually flowing into our ears than when subsequently recollected, and as a battle stirs us more deeply when watched than when being recounted, so the illustrious deeds of living heroes rouse us more ardently to the pursuit of virtue and fashion us more perfectly for it than do the words of the ancient philosophers discussing moral conduct.

4

Dialogus inter Deum et animam theologicus

A theological dialogue between God and the soul

Marsilio Ficino to Michele Mercati of San Miniato, his beloved fellow philosopher: greetings.

We have often talked together of moral and natural philosophy, beloved Michele, and even more often of divine philosophy. I remember you used to say again and again that morals[1] are developed through practice, natural things discovered by reason and the divine begged of God by prayer. I have also read in the works of our Plato that the divine is revealed through purity of living rather than taught by verbal instruction. When I seriously considered these things I sometimes began to feel sick at heart, for I had already come to distrust reason but still lacked faith in revelation. From this there arose an intimate conversation between the soul and God. Listen to this, if you please, although I think you may already be nearer to speaking with God than I.[1]

God: Why do you grieve so much, my unhappy soul? O my daughter, weep no more. Behold, I, your father, am here with you. I am here, your cure and your salvation.

Soul: Oh that my father would enter into me. If I believed such a grace could befall me, ah! I should go mad with joy. As it is, I do not see how that can come about; for if, as I thought, the creator of the world created me, his offspring, nearer to himself than his own created world, he who is

[1] ms dicere, moralia usu

only outside me is not my highest father. Nor could he who was only within me be my father, for my father is certainly greater than I, yet he who is contained in me must be smaller. But I do not know how anything can be both inside me and outside me at the same time. What sorely distresses me, stranger, whoever you may be, is this: that I do not wish to live without my father, yet despair of being able to find him.

GOD: Put an end to your tears, my daughter, and do not torment yourself; it is no stranger who speaks to you but one who is your very own, more familiar to you than you are to yourself. Indeed, I am both with you and within you. I am indeed with you, because I am in you; I am in you, because you are in me. If you were not in me you would not be in yourself, indeed you would not be at all. Dry those tears, my daughter, and look upon your father. Your father is the least of all things in size, just as he is the greatest of all things in excellence; and since he is very small he is within every thing, but since he is very great he is outside everything. See, I am here with you, both within and without, the greatest smallness and the smallest greatness. Behold, I say, do you not see? I fill heaven and earth, I penetrate and contain them. I fill and am not filled, for I am fulness itself. I penetrate and am not penetrated, for I am the power of penetration itself. I contain and am not contained, for I am containing itself. I, who am fulness itself, am not filled, for that would not be worthy of me. I am not penetrated lest I cease to exist, being myself existence. I am not contained lest I cease to be God, who am infinity itself. Behold, do you not see? I pass into everything unmingled, so that I may surpass all; for I am excellence itself. I excel everything without being separate, so that I am also able to enter and permeate at the same time, to enter completely and to make one, being unity itself, through which all things are made and endure, and which all things seek.

Why do you despair of finding your father, O foolish one? It is not difficult to find the place where I am; for in me are all things, out of me come all things and by me are all things sustained forever and everywhere. And with infinite power[a] I expand through infinite space. Indeed no place can be found where I am not; this very 'where' surely exists through me and is called 'everywhere'. Whatever anyone does anywhere, he does through my guidance and my light. Whatever anyone seeks anywhere, he seeks through my guidance and my light. There is no desiring anywhere, except for the good; there is no finding anywhere, except of the truth. I am all good; I am all truth. Seek my face and you shall live. But do not

[a] virtute

move in order to touch me, for I am stillness itself. Do not be drawn in many directions in order to take hold of me; I am unity itself. Stop the movement, unify diversity, and you will surely reach me, who long ago reached you.

SOUL: How quickly you leave me, O my comforter! Why do you so suddenly leave your daughter thirsting like this? Go on, say more, continue I beg you, venerable deity. By your divine majesty, if it please you, I pray you speak more plainly. Oh may it please you! And because I know it will, tell me more plainly then what you, who are my father, are not, that I may be restored to life; and, O my father, tell me again what you are, so that I may live.

GOD: Your father is not of a physical nature, my daughter. The more you obey your father the better you are, and the more you resist the body the finer you are. It is good for you to be with your father, bad for you to be with your body. It was not some mind[b] that fathered you, O soul;[c] otherwise you would contemplate nothing beyond mind and you would be held in that same changing mind, and not seek an unchanging nature. It was no intellect of many parts that made you, for then you would not attain complete simplicity, and the possession of intellect itself would be sufficient for you; but as it is, you ascend by understanding and love beyond any kind of intellect, to life itself, pure existence, absolute being. And understanding is not sufficient for you unless you not only understand well, but understand good itself. Without doubt only the good itself is sufficient for you, for the only reason you seek anything is because it is good.

Therefore, O soul, good is your creator; not the good body, not the good mind, not the good intellect, but good itself. Good is that which is indeed self-sufficient, infinite beyond the limits of what is beneath it, and it bestows on you infinite life, either from age to age, or at least from some beginning to the end of time. Do you desire to look on the face of good? Then look around at the whole universe, full of the light of the sun. Look at the light in the material world, full of all forms in constant movement; take away the matter, leave the rest. You have the soul, an incorporeal light that takes all shapes and is full of change. Once again, take from this the changeability, and now you have reached the intelligence of the angels, the incorporeal light, taking all shapes but unchanging. Take away from

[b] animus
[c] anima

this that diversity by which any form differs from the light,[2] and which is infused into the light from elsewhere, and then the essence of the light and of each form[3] is the same; the light gives form to itself and through its own forms gives form to everything. That light lights without limit, because it lights by its own nature and is not stained by mixture with something else. Nor can it diminish; belonging to nothing, it shines equally through all. Its life is self-dependent, and it confers life on all, seeing that its very shadow is the light of this sun. It alone gives life to the incorporeal. It perceives everything and bestows perception, since its shadow awakens all the senses for all creatures. Finally it loves each single thing, for each single thing is especially its own.

What[4] then is the light of the sun? It is the shadow of God. So what is God? God is the sun of the sun; the light of the sun is God in the physical world, and God is the light of the sun above the intelligences of the angels. My shadow is such, O soul, that it is the most beautiful of all physical things. What do you suppose is the nature of my light? If this is the glory of my shadow,[5] how much greater is the glory of my light?[6] Do you love the light everywhere above all else? Indeed, do you love the light alone? Love only me, O soul, alone the infinite light; love me, the light, boundlessly, I say; then you will shine and be infinitely delighted.

Soul: Oh wonder, surpassing[7] wonder itself! What strange fire consumes me now? What new sun is this, and whence does it shine upon me? What is this spirit, so powerful and so sweet, which at this moment pierces and soothes my inmost heart? Whence does it come? It bites and licks, goads and tickles. What bitter sweetness is this? Who could think it? This bitter sweetness melts me through and through and disembowels me. After this even the sweetest things seem bitter to me. What sweet bitterness it is which joins together my torn fragments, making me one again, by which even the most bitter is made sweet to me? How irresistible is this will! I cannot but desire the good itself; I may avoid or postpone anything else, but not this longing for the good. How freely chosen is this necessity; for if I want to avoid it, I shall try to do so only because I think the avoidance itself is good. Nothing is more freely chosen than the good;

[2] ms est a lumine
[3] ms et formae cuiusque
[4] ms Ergo quid Solis
[5] ms mea fulget umbra
[6] ms mea lucet? Amas
[7] ms ipsam exsuperat. Quis

because of it I desire all things; no, rather it is good which I desire in all things everywhere, and desire in such a way that I do not even wish to be capable of not desiring it. Who would think it? How full of life is that death by which I die in myself but live in God, by which I die to the dead but live for life, and live by life and rejoice in joy! Oh pleasure beyond sense! Oh delight beyond mind![d] Oh joy beyond understanding! I am now out of my mind, but not mindless, because I am beyond mind. Again I am in a frenzy, all too great a frenzy; yet I do not fall to the ground; I am borne upward. Now I expand in every direction[8] and overflow but am not dispersed, because God, the unity of unities, brings me to myself,[9] because he makes me live with himself. Therefore now rejoice with me, all you whose rejoicing is God. My God has come to me, the God of the universe has embraced me. The God of gods even now enters my inmost being. Now indeed God himself nourishes me wholly, and he who created me recreates me. He who brought forth the soul, transforms it into angel, turns it into God. How shall I give thanks to you, O grace of graces? Teach me yourself, O grace of graces; I pray you teach me and be my guide. May that grace be to you which is your very self, O God.

[8] ms undique tota, et
[9] ms colligit mecum, quia
[d] animum

5

Medicina corpus, musica spiritum, theologia animum curat

Medicine heals the body, music the spirit, and theology the soul

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco Musano of Iesi: greetings.

As soon as you were cured of your wrongly diagnosed tertian fever[1][a] by our medicines, both you and Giovanni Aurelio paid your respects to our

[a] tertiana notha

Academy, as if it were your own doctor. You then asked for and heard the sound of the lyre and the singing of hymns.

Since then you have gleaned a great deal from our *Theology*. Do not be surprised, Francesco, that we combine medicine and the lyre with the study of theology. Since you are dedicated to philosophy, you must remember that within us nature has bonded body and spirit with the soul.[2] The body is indeed healed by the remedies of medicine; but spirit, which is the airy vapour[1] of our blood[b] and the link between body and soul, is tempered and nourished by airy smells, by sounds, and by song. Finally, the soul, as it is divine, is purified by the divine mysteries of theology. In nature a union is made from soul, body and spirit. To the Egyptian priests medicine, music[2] and the mysteries were one and the same study. Would that we could master this natural and Egyptian art as successfully as we tenaciously and wholeheartedly apply ourselves to it! But enough of these things for the present.

You asked me yesterday to transcribe for you that maxim of mine that is inscribed around the walls of the Academy. Receive it. 'All things are directed from goodness to goodness. Rejoice in the present; set no value on property, seek no honours. Avoid excess; avoid activity. Rejoice in the present.'

Farewell.

[1] ms vapor est, et
[2] ms pharmacis fidibusque, mysteriis
[b] aereus sanguinis vaporem

6

Lex et iustitia

Law and justice

Marsilio Ficino to Ottone Niccolini and Benedetto d'Arezzo, lawyers, and Piero de' Pazzi and Bernardo Giugni, knights: greetings.

You persuaded me to render the *Laws* of Plato from Greek into Latin, and the great Cosimo also encouraged me to the same work. This I have

already done, and all the more willingly because I considered the state to need the best lawyers[1] more than good merchants or doctors. In the same degree as Minos benefited the Greeks more than Galen did, so is the soul superior to the body or the spirit, and eternal life to the temporal. Indeed, commerce appears to be the body of the state, medicine the spirit, and law the soul. Yet, although there appear to be many laws in the state there are not many souls. For, just as many skills and many levels of citizen do not make many states but only one if they move towards the same goal and according to similar principles, so there may be many magistrates' regulations in a city yet there is but one public law. This is the common rule of living justly, which leads to the public happiness. God and nature prepare us for this law, regulations guide us towards it, and God alone finally makes us conform to it. For from the divine law spring both the law of the stars and the law of men.[1]

For this reason all lawgivers have partly like apes copied Moses, the truest author of divine laws. Partly compelled by truth, I know not how, they have affirmed that they received the laws from God in various guises: Osiris, the giver of laws to the Egyptians, from Mercurius; Zoroaster of the Arimaspians, from a good spirit; Zamolxis of the Scythians, from Vesta; Minos of Crete and Solon of Athens, from Jove; Lycurgus of Sparta, from Apollo; Numa, King of the Romans, from the nymph Egeria; Mohammed, King of the Arabs, from the angel Gabriel. Our own Plato took the framework for his books on law from God, whom he declared to be the universal author of all laws. This he also confirmed in the dialogue entitled[2] *Protagoras*,[2] saying that those skills which relate to sustaining life, were handed down to us by Prometheus, that is, human providence. But the law of living[3] well and happily was granted by Jove, that is by divine providence, through Mercury, which is angelic inspiration. My good friends, I cannot but admire the power[4] of the law. For the order and harmony of law are necessary in the elements of the universe, the humours of a living being, the life of beasts, and also a den of thieves; even these men cannot live together without some just order. But what shall we say about this? That although among lower beings there may be no other virtue, yet even here law and justice are not lacking, which punish the wicked according to their deserts; and although among the

[1] ms optimis iuris consultis
[2] ms qui Protagoras inscribitur
[3] ms fœliciterque vivendi ab
[4] ms optimi vim legis

blessed those moral virtues are no longer necessary which in mortals contribute to calming[5] the agitation of body and senses, from which those who enjoy the blessed life are already free, yet law and justice flourish amongst them, endowing each with eternal rewards according to his merit, and protecting the blessed.

Farewell, fortunate men.

[5] ms ad sedandas corporis

7

De divino furore

On divine frenzy

Marsilio Ficino to Peregrino Agli: greetings.

On November 29th my father, Ficino the doctor, brought to me at Figline two letters from you, one in verse and the other in prose. Having read these, I heartily congratulate our age for producing a young man whose name and fame may render it illustrious.

Indeed, my dearest Peregrino, when I consider your age and those things which come from you every day, I not only rejoice but much marvel at such great gifts in a friend. I do not know which of the ancients whose[1] memory we respect, not to mention men of our own time, achieved so much at your age. This I ascribe not just to study and technique, but much more to[2] divine frenzy. Without this, say Democritus and Plato,[1] no man has ever been great. The powerful emotion and burning desire which your writings express prove, as I have said, that you are inspired and inwardly possessed by that frenzy; and this power, which is manifested in external movements, the ancient philosophers maintained was the most potent proof that the divine force dwelt in our souls. But since I have mentioned this frenzy, I shall relate the opinion of our Plato

[1] ms quorum memoriam veneramur

[2] ms divino illi furori

about it in a few words, with that brevity which a letter demands; so that you may easily understand what it is, how many kinds of it there are, and which god is responsible for each. I am sure that this description will not only please you, but also be of the very greatest use to you. Plato considers, as Pythagoras, Empedocles and Heraclitus maintained earlier, that our soul, before it descended into bodies, dwelt in the abodes of heaven where, as Socrates says in the *Phaedrus*,[2] it was nourished and rejoiced in the contemplation of truth.

Those philosophers I have just mentioned had learnt from Mercurius Trismegistus,[3] the wisest of all the Egyptians, that God is the supreme source and light within whom shine the models of all things, which they call ideas.[4] Thus, they believed, it followed that the soul, in steadfastly contemplating the eternal mind of God, also beholds with greater clarity the natures of all things. So, according to Plato, the soul saw justice itself, wisdom, harmony, and the marvellous beauty of the divine nature.[5] And sometimes he calls all these natures 'ideas', sometimes 'divine essences', and sometimes 'first natures which exist in the eternal mind of God'. The minds of men, while they are there, are well nourished with perfect knowledge. But souls are depressed into bodies through thinking about and desiring earthly things. Then those who were previously fed on ambrosia and nectar, that is the perfect knowledge and bliss of God, in their descent are said to drink continuously of the river Lethe, that is forgetfulness of the divine. They do not fly back to heaven, whence they fell by weight of their earthly thoughts, until they begin to contemplate once more those divine natures which they have forgotten. The divine philosopher considers we achieve this through two virtues, one relating to moral conduct and the other to contemplation; one he names with a common term 'justice', and the other 'wisdom'. For this reason, he says, souls fly back to heaven on two wings, meaning, as I understand it, these virtues; and likewise Socrates teaches in *Phaedo*[6] that we acquire these by the two parts of philosophy; namely the active and the contemplative. Hence, he says again in *Phaedrus*[7] that only the mind of a philosopher regains wings. On recovery of these wings, the soul is separated from the body by their power. Filled with God, it strives with all its might to reach the heavens, and thither it is drawn. Plato calls this drawing away and striving 'divine frenzy', and he divides it into four parts.[8] He thinks that men never remember the divine unless they are stirred by its shadows or images, as they may be described, which are perceived by the bodily senses.

Paul and Dionysius[9], the wisest of the Christian theologians, affirm that

the invisible things of God are understood from what has been made and is to be seen here,[10] but Plato says that the wisdom of men is the image of divine wisdom. He thinks that the harmony which we make with musical instruments and voices is the image of divine harmony, and that the symmetry and comeliness that arise from the perfect union of the parts and members of the body are an image of divine beauty.

Since[3] wisdom is present in no man, or at any rate in very few, and cannot be perceived by bodily sense, it follows that images of divine wisdom are very rare amongst us, hidden from our senses and totally ignored. Because of this, Socrates says in *Phaedrus*[11] that the image of wisdom may not be seen at all by the eyes, because if it were it would deeply arouse that marvellous love of the divine wisdom of which it is an[4] image.

But[12] we do indeed perceive the reflection of divine beauty with our eyes and mark the resonance of divine harmony with our ears—those bodily senses which Plato considers the most perceptive of all. Thus when the soul has received through the[5] physical senses those images which are within material objects, we remember what we knew before when we existed outside the prison of the body. The soul is[6] fired by this memory and, shaking its wings, by degrees purges itself from contact[7] with the body and its filth and becomes wholly possessed by divine frenzy. From the two senses I have just mentioned two kinds of frenzy are aroused. Regaining the memory of the true and divine beauty by the appearance of beauty that the eyes perceive, we desire the former with a secret and unutterable ardour of the mind. This Plato calls 'divine love', which he defines as the desire to return again to the contemplation of divine beauty; a desire arising from the sight of its physical likeness. Moreover, it is necessary for him who is so moved not only to desire that supernal beauty but also wholly to delight in its appearance which is revealed to his eyes. For Nature has so ordained that he who seeks anything should also delight in its image; but Plato holds it the mark of a dull mind and corrupt state if a man desires no more than the shadows of that beauty nor looks for anything beyond the form his eyes can see. For he believes that such a man is afflicted with the kind of love that is the companion of wantonness and

[3] ms vero sapientia nullis
[4] ms cuius id simulachrum
[5] ms sensus haustis
[6] ms recordatione exardescat animus
[7] ms corporis contagione, sordibusque

lust. And he defines as irrational and heedless the love of that pleasure in physical form which is enjoyed by the senses.

Elsewhere he describes this love as the ardent desire of a soul which in a way is dead in its own body, while alive in another. He then says that the soul of a lover leads its life in another body. This the Epicureans follow when they say that love is a union of small particles, which they call atoms, made to penetrate the person from whom the images of beauty have been taken. Plato says that this kind of love is born of human sickness and is full of trouble and anxiety, and that it arises in those men whose mind is so covered over with darkness that it dwells on nothing exalted, nothing outstanding, nothing beyond the weak and transient image[8] of this little body. It does not look up to the heavens, for in its black prison it is shuttered by night.[13] But when those whose spirit[a] is drawn away and freed from the clay of the body first see form and grace in any one, they rejoice, as at the reflection of divine beauty. But those people should at once recall to memory that divine beauty, which they should honour and desire above all; as it is by a burning desire for this beauty that they may be drawn to the heavens. This first attempt at flight Plato calls divine ecstasy and frenzy. I have already written enough about that frenzy which, I have said, arises through the eyes.

But the soul receives the sweetest harmonies and numbers through the ears, and by these echoes is reminded and aroused to the divine music which may be heard by the more subtle and penetrating sense of mind. According to the followers of Plato, divine music is twofold. One kind, they say, exists entirely in the eternal mind of God. The second is in the motions and order of the heavens, by which the heavenly spheres and their orbits make a marvellous harmony. In both of these our soul took part before it was imprisoned in our bodies. But it uses the ears as messengers, as though they were chinks in this darkness. By the ears, as I have already said, the soul receives the echoes of that incomparable music, by which it is led back to the deep and silent memory of the harmony which it previously enjoyed. The whole soul then kindles with desire to fly back to[9] its rightful home, so that it may enjoy that true music again. It realises that as long as it is[10] enclosed in the dark abode of the body it[11] can in no

[8] ms imaginem, nec
[9] ms fruatur, ad sedes
[10] ms habitaculo circumseptus est
[11] ms modo posse intelligat
[a] ingenium

way reach that music. It therefore strives wholeheartedly to imitate it, because it cannot here enjoy its possession. Now with men this imitation is twofold. Some imitate the celestial music by harmony of voice and the sounds of various instruments, and these we call superficial and vulgar musicians. But some, who imitate the divine and heavenly harmony with deeper and sounder judgment, render a sense of its inner reason and knowledge into verse, feet and numbers. It is these who, inspired by the divine spirit, give forth with full voice the most solemn and glorious song. Plato calls this solemn music and poetry the most effective imitation of the celestial harmony. For the more superficial kind which I have just mentioned does no more than soothe with the sweetness of the voice, but poetry does what is also proper to divine harmony. It expresses with fire the most profound and, as a poet would say, prophetic meanings, in the numbers of voice and movement. Thus not only does it delight the ear, but brings to the mind the finest nourishment, most like the food of the gods; and so seems to come very close to God. In Plato's view, this poetic frenzy springs from the Muses; but he considers both the man and his poetry worthless who approaches the doors of poetry without the call of the Muses, in the hope that he will become a good poet by technique.[14] He thinks that those poets who are possessed by divine inspiration and power often utter such supreme words when inspired by the Muses, that afterwards, when the rapture has left them, they themselves scarcely understand what they have uttered.[15]

And, as I believe, the divine Plato considers that the Muses should be understood as divine songs; thus they say 'melody' and 'muse' take their name from 'song'.[16] Hence divine men are inspired by divine beings and song to imitate them by employing the modes and metres of poetry. When Plato deals with the motion of the spheres in the *Republic*,[17] he says that one siren is established within each orbit;[12] meaning, as one Platonist says,[18] that by the movement of the spheres song is offered to the gods. For 'siren' rightly means in Greek 'singing in honour of God'. And the ancient theologians maintained[19] that the nine Muses were the musical songs of the eight spheres, and in addition the one great harmony arising from all the others.

Therefore, poetry springs from divine frenzy, frenzy from the Muses, and the Muses from Jove. The followers of Plato repeatedly call the soul of the whole universe Jove, who inwardly nourishes heaven and earth, the

[12] ms singulis orbibus insidere

moving seas, the moon's shining orb, the stars and sun.[20] Permeating every limb, he moves the whole mass and mingles with its vast substance.

It is thus that the heavenly spheres are set in motion and governed by Jove, the spirit and mind of the whole universe, and that from him also arise the musical songs of these spheres, which are called the Muses. As that illustrious Platonist says, 'Jove is the origin of the Muses;[21] all things are full of Jove, and that spirit which is called Jove is everywhere; he enlivens and fulfils all things.' And as Alexander Milesius, the Pythagorean, says, 'touching the heavens as though they were a lyre, he creates this celestial harmony.' The divine prophet Orpheus[22] says, 'Jove is first, Jove is last, Jove is the head, Jove is the centre. The universe is born of Jove, Jove is the foundation of the earth and of the star-bearing heavens. Jove appears as man, yet he is the spotless bride. Jove is the breath and form[13] of all things, Jove is the source of the ocean, Jove is the movement in the undying fire, Jove is the sun and moon, Jove, the King and Prince of all. Hiding his light, he has shed it afresh from his blissful heart, manifesting his purpose.' We may understand from this that all bodies are full of Jove; he contains and nourishes them, so that truly it is said that whatever you see and wherever you move is Jove.

After these follow the remaining kinds of divine frenzy, which Plato considers are twofold. One is centred in the mysteries, and the other, which he calls prophecy, concerns future events. The first, he says, is a powerful stirring of the soul, in perfecting what relates to the worship of the gods, religious observance, purification and sacred ceremonies. But the tendency of mind which falsely imitates that frenzy he calls superstition. He considers the last kind of frenzy, in which he includes prophecy, to be nothing other than foreknowledge inspired by the divine spirit, which we properly call divination and prophecy. If the soul[14] is fired in the act of divination he calls it frenzy; that is, when the mind, withdrawn from the body, is moved by divine rapture. But if someone foresees future events by human ingenuity rather than by divine inspiration, he thinks that this should be named foresight or inference. From all this it is now clear that there are four kinds of divine frenzy: love, poetry, the mysteries and prophecy. That[15] common and completely insane love is a false copy of divine love; superficial music, of poetry; superstition, of the mysteries; and prediction, of prophecy. According to Plato, Socrates attributes the

[13] ms spiritus omnium
[14] ms si animus in
[15] ms ille alter vulgaris

first kind of frenzy to Venus, the second to the Muses, the third to Dionysius, and the last to Apollo.[23]

I have chosen to describe at greater length the frenzy belonging to divine love and poetry for two reasons: first, because I know you are strongly moved by both of these; and second, so that you will remember that what is written by you comes not from you but from Jove and the Muses, with whose spirit and divinity you are filled. For this reason, my Pellegrino, you will act justly and rightly if you acknowledge, as I believe you do already, that the author and cause of what is best and greatest is not you, nor indeed any other man, but immortal God.[16]

Farewell, and be sure that nothing is dearer to me than you are.

1st December 1457.
Figline.

[16] ms potius Deum autorem

8

Excusatio prolixitatis

An excuse for prolixity

Marsilio Ficino to the great Cosimo: greetings.

Lorenzo, the priest from Pisa, is expounding for you Solomon's *Song of Songs*. He has so far written eighteen volumes, if I remember aright, to explain one small book. If you are surprised, Cosimo, that Lorenzo wrote so lengthily when Solomon was so brief, I reply that Lorenzo was obliged to be lengthy because Solomon was so brief. The more intricate the knot which Solomon tied, the more devices were necessary to unravel it.

The distinguished philosopher Niccolo Tignosi[1] of Foligno praises Lorenzo's writings, and I agree with him. Although I usually dislike

[1] ms Nicolaus Tignosius Fulginas

prolixity, it does not seem to me that the work is too long, since I find hardly anything of importance in theology that he has not included within it.

But, farewell, lest I become prolix myself while excusing prolixity.

9

De divinatione et divinitate animae

On divination and the divinity of the soul

Marsilio Ficino of Florence to his fellow philosopher Matteo Corsini: greetings.

The father of my mother Alessandra was called Giovanni, and her mother was called Angela. Alessandra was in Figline, Giovanni in the town of Montevarchi, and Angela in Florence. Angela wrote to Giovanni and Alessandra that she was well, and would return on the following day. They read her letters, and while asleep that night they both saw Angela at the same time. She appeared to Alessandra in the entrance of the house, and when the daughter was greeting her mother as if she had returned home, the mother avoided her daughter's embrace. 'Farewell', she said, 'and take care that the priests pray to God for me.' And to Giovanni she said, 'My Giovanni, how I grieve at your misfortune! Farewell, and ask that prayers be offered to God for me.'

Suddenly aroused by these visions, they both cried out, thinking her to be dead. They sent to Florence. The news came back that she had departed this life that very night.

You may wonder at these things, Corsini, but listen to something equally miraculous. As soon as her son was born, my mother entrusted him to a country woman as a wet nurse. Seventeen days later, while asleep at noon, it seemed to her that she was deeply troubled and was being comforted by her own mother, long since dead, who said 'Do not grieve, my daughter.' On the following day, the country people brought her the news that her son had been suffocated by the nurse.

I shall omit how she foresaw in a dream that her husband, Ficino the doctor, would fall from his horse, and where it would happen. I shall also omit many other instances of this kind. For the present it is enough to have told you these two stories which seem to confirm two things in particular. First, that the souls of men which are almost separated from their bodies because of a temperate disposition and a pure life may in the abstraction of sleep[1] divine many things,[1] for they are divine by nature; and whenever they return to themselves, they realise this divinity. The second thing these stories confirm is that the souls of the dead, freed from the chains of the body, can influence us[2], and care about human affairs. Hesiod[2] sang of this; our Plato[3] confirmed it in the *Laws*; and both these men were known as heroes to all antiquity.

Farewell.

[1] ms puritatem, somni abstractionem
[2] ms vinculis, erga nos posse nonnihil

10

Modus laudis absque adulatione

How to praise without flattering

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco da Castiglione, the theologian: greetings.

I HAVE read your commentaries on the psalms of the prophet David. I must say, Francesco, that just as God found David a man after his own heart, so David has found you a man after his. But where we suspect an opinion to be flattery, it is better to hint than to explain.

Give my greetings to Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, a remarkable man, both for his learning and humanity.

Farewell.

11

Solitariae vitae utilitas

The usefulness of the solitary life

Marsilio Ficino to the priest Gregorio Epifanio, his fellow philosopher: greetings.

God is unchanging unity; a single stillness. This, as you are aware, is clearly expounded by our Platonists.[1] Therefore, whoever desires to attain God, avoids large numbers and movement as much as he can.

Let us, therefore, my Gregorio, retire into that one unmoving watch-tower of the mind; where, as Plato[2] says, the unseen light will shine unceasingly upon us. Indeed, so that we may then more easily be able to do this without interruption, I have decided to stay for a while on Monte Vecchio, which has been bestowed on me by the great Cosimo; and you shall be there with me.

You have heard the proverb: 'For the good man, without his friend, joy in possession soon will end.' I know of no companion it would give me more joy to have there with me at that time than you.

Farewell, and fly to me.

12

De modestia componendi

On modesty in writing

Bessarion, Cardinal of Sabina to the Platonist Marsilio Ficino: greetings.

Respected and learned friend: in previous letters we promised to send you our work in defence of Plato, which, after burning the midnight oil,

has just been published. We do this not only because of your genius and exceptional enthusiasm for the Platonic teaching but also that you may easily see what we have drawn from that source, and read whether, in this work of ours, any eloquence or knowledge of the liberal arts shines out.

If we have succeeded, we readily concede that either we have taken it all from him, or that he has himself provided his own defence. It seems also to be greatly to his credit that he has pleaded his cause by his own powers and with the magnificence of his own language. He did not need the help of another, but merely allowed room for the voice and zeal of his defender. We have sent you this book by the hand of those who look after the affairs of the Medici here. In sending it, we believe we have satisfied our obligations and promise, as well as your zeal and enthusiasm for Plato.

Farewell, and let us know whether you receive the book.

13th September, 1469.
Rome.

13

De laude Platonicorum interpretum

In praise of those who expound Plato

Marsilio Ficino, the Florentine, to Bessarion, the Greek, Cardinal of Sabina: greetings.

You are well aware, venerable father, that when our Plato discoursed on beauty in the *Phaedrus*[1] with such insight and at such length, it was beauty of soul he sought from God, which he called wisdom and most precious gold. When this gold was given to Plato by God, it shone in him most brilliantly, because he was so pure in heart.

Although this great brilliance is revealed in his words and writings, yet the treasure became enveloped by darkness in the mind, and difficult to see, as if covered with a cloak[1] of earth. It lay hidden from any man who

[1] ms quodam ambitu obsitum

did not have eyes like a lynx. For this reason some men of narrow learning[2] were once deceived by the outer crust and, since they could not penetrate to the core, they despised the hidden treasure.

But when that gold was put into the workshop first of Plotinus[3] then of Porphyry,[4] Iamblichus[5] and eventually of Proclus,[6] the earth was removed by the searching test of fire, and the gold so shone that it filled the whole world again with marvellous splendour. But some night owls, it seems, were upset by such bright rays of light, and not only despised the sacred treasure of our Plato, as some had before, but sinfully even began to abuse it, which was much worse than the first error!

But Bessarion, the light of the Academy, swiftly applied an effective medicine for these dim and feeble eyes, so that the gold would be not only pure and shining, but malleable for the hands and harmless to the sight. This Plato foretold; he said to King Dionysius[7] that a time would come after many generations, when the mysteries of theology would be purified by penetrating discussion, as gold is purified by fire. This time has come indeed, Bessarion! May the spirit of Plato, we, and all his followers, rejoice at this exceedingly!

Farewell.

14

Exhortatio ad scientiam

An exhortation to pursue knowledge

Marsilio Ficino to Antonio de' Pazzi: greetings.

Lorenzo de' Medici especially praises two qualities in you; magnanimity and intelligence. And I praise them too. In the practice of magnanimity, Antonio, you can be compared with others, but in the exercise of intelligence you can only be compared with yourself. If you devoted yourself to learning as much as you have long practised liberality, I do not doubt

that you would shortly be more learned than anyone else, just as you are now more magnanimous.

Come, my dearest Antonio, I beg you take charge of yourself, just as you have charge over others. Our Lorenzo says that not only are you generous towards the learned but very learned yourself. I believe him and am glad. But I shall not be satisfied until your knowledge is as great as your magnanimity. If you delight especially in very learned men, first of all make sure that you can delight in yourself. What then[1]? Order in all things is worth much, indeed it is worth everything. I beg you, each day set aside four hours for yourself; give the rest to your friends whenever you please.

Farewell. But do you wish to fare well? Then study well and study today, I beg you. The man who studies tomorrow, never studies.

8th November, 1473.

[1] ms ergo ordo in.

15

Consolatio in alicuius obitu

Consolation on someone's death

Marsilio Ficino gives consolation to Gismondo della Stufa.

If each of us, essentially, is that which is greatest within us, which always remains the same and by which we understand ourselves, then certainly the soul is the man himself and the body but his shadow. Whatever wretch is so deluded as to think that the shadow of man is man, like Narcissus[1] is dissolved in tears. You will only cease to weep, Gismondo, when you cease looking for your Albiera degli Albizzi in her dark shadow and begin to follow her by her own clear light. For the further she is from that misshapen shadow the more beautiful will you find her, past all you have ever known.

Withdraw into[1] your soul, I beg you, where you will possess her soul which is so beautiful and dear to you; or rather, from your soul withdraw to God.[2] There you will contemplate the beautiful idea[3] through which the Divine Creator fashioned your Albiera; and as she is far more lovely in her Creator's form than in her own, so you will embrace her there with far more joy.

Farewell.

1st August, 1473.
Florence.

[1] ms secede in animum

16

Laus veritatis

Praise of truth

Marsilio Ficino to Angelo Poliziano, the Homeric poet: greetings.

As you say, some letters are being passed around under my name which are written in the style of Aristippus,[1] and to some extent in that of Lucretius,[2] rather than of Plato. If they are mine, Angelo, they are not like that: and if they are like that, they are definitely not mine, but fabricated by my detractors; for, as everyone knows, I have followed the divine Plato from my youth.

But you will easily distinguish my own writings from others in this way: in my letters, as far as in me lies, there is always a purpose relating to morals, natural subjects, or theology. But if occasionally there is anything in them in some way relating to love, it is certainly Platonic and honourable, not Aristippian and wanton.

Moreover, the praises they contain are genuine and such as to encourage and advise, not to flatter; and there are almost no unnecessary words, for I decided at the beginning of my studies always to write as briefly as possible;

since in time's brief span to use words in excess is the mark of a lover of words rather than a lover of wisdom. And since there are very few people with much knowledge, often the loquacious speak falsely or unnecessarily, or both.

All this is alien to the dignity of a man, and very far from the profession of a philosopher.

Farewell.

17

Quantum utile sit alere doctos

How useful it is to maintain scholars

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

Almost all other rich men support servants of pleasure,[1] but you support priests of the Muses. I pray you, continue, my Lorenzo, for those others will end up as the slaves of pleasure whereas you will become the delight of the Muses. It was due to you that Homer, the high priest of the Muses, came into Italy, and someone who was till now a wanderer and a beggar has at last found with you sweet[2] hospitality. You are supporting in your home that young Homeric scholar, Angelo Poliziano, so that he may put the Greek face of Homer into Latin[3] colours.

He is already doing so and, what is remarkable in one so young, he is doing it in such a way that unless one knew Homer was Greek, one would doubt which of the two was the original Homer and which the likeness.

Continue to attract such artists, Medici; for other painters adorn the walls for a time, but these render their inhabitants illustrious for ever.

Farewell.

[1] ms nutriunt voluptatum, tu
[2] ms hospitium reperit
[3] ms personam latinis coloribus

18

Laus opificis non a verbis, sed ab opere

Praise of an artist does not arise from his words, but his work

Marsilio Ficino to Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici: greetings.

Medici, receive with a glad heart a poem of Naldo, the Florentine, and some discourses of Benedetto Colucci of Pistoia. Naldo is the delight of Phoebus[1] and Colucci the companion of Mercury.[2]

I do not want to praise them sparingly since they seem worthy of praise beyond measure, yet I do not care to praise them much lest by praising those who praise me I appear to extol myself. So I shall remain silent on the virtues of these painters-in-words. Study the canvas carefully yourselves; the pictures will speak.[1] When a painter speaks he speaks badly, but when his painting speaks it speaks well.

Vain is that artist who seeks honour from anyone rather than from the work itself, for the virtue of a work does not depend on him who judges it; rather does the work commend the artist to the judge.

Farewell.

[1] ms pictura loquentur, quum

19

De virtutibus civilibus purgatoriis, purgati animi exemplaribus

On the civil virtues, the purgatorial virtues, and the model virtues of the purified soul

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco Lapaccini and Migliore Cresci: greetings.

Those men seek God the most direct way who first of all cut back the immoderate desires of the soul through the civil virtues.[1] They then[1] cut

[1] ms amputant. Deinde per

them back to the quick by the purgatorial virtues. Thus cleansed, in the third stage they root them out with all their might through the virtues that belong to the purified soul. When these desires have been rooted out, as far as is humanly possible, such men finally are formed by the model virtues which are in God.

Those three kinds of virtue are the steps by which we gradually approach the divine virtues. In time every natural movement can attain its end and everything which has been prepared by nature to take form can finally achieve that form.

20

De sapiente et fœlice viro

On the wise and fortunate man

Marsilio Ficino to his fellow philosopher, Antonio Serafico of San Miniato: greetings.

I CONSIDER that man wise and fortunate, who lives happy in the midst of calamities because he depends on God alone; whom fear does not weaken, nor pain torment; who is not corrupted by desire, nor inflamed by passion. Amongst the thickest thorns he gathers delicate and beautiful flowers; from dung he pulls and digs out pearls; he sees in the darkest night; burdened with shackles and bound by chains, he runs on as though unfettered and free; until at length the Holy Spirit breathes upon him.

Imitate then, as you have so begun, Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato; who applied themselves to philosophy no less in action than in discussion, even when fortune seemed against them. Many have paid lip service to philosophy, but these men served it with their whole heart. He tastes nothing, Serafico, who has not tasted for himself.

Farewell; and persevere in your conduct.

21

Bona scribere praestat quam multa

It is better to write good things than many things

Marsilio Ficino to Angelo Poliziano, the Homeric poet: greetings.

Why do you ask so often for the titles of my books,[1] Angelo? Is it perhaps so that you can praise me in your verse? However, there is no praise in number, but in selection; there is no goodness in quantity, but in quality. Or is it that you may have with you all that is mine? Whatever the reasons, take what you ask, since everything is common among friends.

I have translated from Greek into Latin the *Physics* and *Elements of Theology* of the Platonist Proclus and the four books by Iamblichus of Chalcis about the Pythagorean School, the *Mathematics* of Theo of Smyrna, the *Platonic Definitions* of Speusippus, the *Epitome of Platonism* by Alcinous, the book by Xenocrates on the *Consolation of Death*, the *Hymns* and *Symbols* of Pythagoras, the work of Hermes Trismegistus on the *Power and Wisdom of God*, all the works of Plato.

I have written a commentary on the Gospels, one on Plato's *Phaedrus*,[1] one on his *Philebus*, about the Highest Good, and one on the *Symposium* about love. I have written a book on *Physiognomy* and on the *Principles of Platonic discipline* to Cristoforo Landino, which I later amended; also a compendium on *The Opinions of the Philosophers on God and the Soul*, on *Economics*, on *Pleasure*, on *The Four Schools of Philosophy*, on *Magnanimity*, *Happiness*, *Justice*, *Divine Frenzy*, on *Consolation for Parents on the Death of a Son*, on *Desire*, a *Theological Prayer to God*, a *Theological Dialogue between God and the Soul*, a *Theology on the Immortality of Souls* in 18 books, a work on *The Christian Religion*, *Arguments against the Opinions of Astrologers*, on the *Rapture of Paul into the Third Heaven*, on *Light*, *The Principles of Platonic Theology*, *The Life and Teaching of Plato*, *Five Questions about Mind*, and a volume of *Philosophic Letters*.

[1] ms Evangelia, Commentarium in Phaedrum Platonis, Commentarium in Platonis Philebum de Summo.

Angelo, would that I had written well as I have written copiously! Would that[2] my works might please others as much as I do you, and you me!

Farewell.

[2] ms scripserimus, utinam tantum

22

Exhortatio ad scientiam

An exhortation to pursue knowledge

Marsilio Ficino to Niccolo degli Albizzi: greetings.

You have heard that proverb, my dear Niccolo: Nothing is sweeter than profit. But what man does profit? He who takes possession of that which will be his. What we know is ours, everything else depends on fortune. Let small-minded men envy the rich, that is those whose coffers are rich but not their minds. You should emulate those wise and good men whose mind is like God. Warn your fellow students to beware of Scylla and Charybdis; that is, the attractions of pleasure and the noisome fever of the mind given to opinion rather than knowledge.[1] Let them remember that one day the highest delight for each will be that which is experienced in the highest part of the mind, in the supreme treasury of truth itself, when they discard the shadow of worthless pleasures for the sake of knowledge. The tree of knowledge, even if it seems to have rather bitter roots brings forth the sweetest possible fruit. Let them remember too that there will never be too much of this fruit because there is never enough.[1]

He who still doubts has not yet learnt enough, yet we doubt as long as we live; and so as long as we live we should learn. Indeed we should imitate[2] the wise Solon, who even when dying sought to learn something, for he was nourished by the food of truth and to him death was no more

[1] ms nunquam satis fit

[2] ms Imitandus est sapiens

than rebirth. A man can never die who enjoys immortal nourishment. Socrates was first called the wisest of all men by Apollo,[2] when he began to say publicly that he knew nothing. Pythagoras told his disciples that they should look at themselves in a mirror, not by the light of a lamp, but by the light of the sun. What is the light of a lamp, if it is not a mind as yet too little instructed by knowledge? What the light of the sun, if not the mind totally under its instruction?

When, therefore, anyone wants to know about the state of his mind,[a] he should compare it not with the ignorant, but on the contrary with the wisest; thus he may see more clearly how much he has gained and how much remains. In feeding the mind we ought to imitate gluttons and the covetous, who always fix their attention on what is still left. What is there further?

The Lord of Life says, 'No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is worthy of reward'[3] You have heard too of that woman who, because she turned back, was changed into a pillar.[4] You have also heard how Orpheus, when he looked back, lost Eurydice; in other words, his depth of judgment. Ineffective and empty-handed is the hunter who goes backwards rather than forwards.

Farewell.

[a] animi

23

Invitatio ad scribendum

A request for a letter

Lorenzo de' Medici to Marsilio Ficino, the Platonic philosopher: greetings.

Dearest Marsilio, when I was leaving for this place I urged you not to let me await your letters too long while I was away, and to this you agreed. But already four days have passed since our parting and there is still no letter from you; although a great many letters have been delivered to me from my household and other friends. Thus I am surprised and sorry

at your delay in writing, because I fully believed that if good will were equally strong in us both there would be equal enthusiasm in correspondence, which is a duty of love.

I began at first to make an excuse for you, saying to myself on your behalf, 'Perhaps the study of philosophy, which demands the whole and undivided man, is the reason why Marsilio's letter has not reached me'; and my almost unbelievable love led me to make to myself the most honourable excuse of all. I had so much confidence in it that waiting for a few hours did not seem too difficult.

But since I saw that I must count in many days what I had thought should be measured in hours, there no longer appeared any room for excuse. Now I, who had taken up your defence, began to think only of how I should prosecute you, since many ways came to mind. I find so many varieties of offence in you that even if you engaged Demosthenes and our own Cicero as your counsel for the defence, I am certain you would be condemned.

Now if you are not sorry for this—and I seek no other sign of repentence than your letters—know that you will undergo judgment at the court of our mutual love, for it is right that the case should be tried by such a judge. We shall find nobody fairer or more just, or anyone who could be a truer witness to our own soul. This judge gives you only the space of three days to write to me, and if these go by without your doing so, he promises you will be condemned.

'But,' you will say, 'what can I write to Lorenzo? I have no news of the Republic, no domestic issues to report.' I expect neither from you, since you have taken no heed of either. I know that you are no more solicitous about the affairs of others than about your own. Then what is there for you to write about? Anything that comes to mind. Everything that comes from you is good, everything that you think is right, and therefore everything that you write is profitable and delightful to me. What makes me so long for your letters is that in them humour appears so mixed with gravity that if considered lightheartedly everything seems full of humour, if seriously, then they seem more serious than anything else. So as soon as you have an opportunity to write, I beg you delay no longer, nor let me vainly[1] wait so long for your letters.

Farewell.

Pisa.

[1] ms nos frustra literas

24

Gratiarum actio

Giving thanks

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

I HAVE received many great gifts from you in the past, Lorenzo, but the most recent was the greatest and kindest of them all, the Church of Saint Christopher.[1] But why have I not yet thanked you? Because I knew that it was bestowed upon you and not me; for whatever was done in this matter was done because of you and for your sake. I suspected therefore until now, I do not know why, that you would perhaps take sole possession of this benefice, the whole of which[1] was bestowed upon you alone.

But after you left for Pisa I learnt straight away[2] that the gift from the Rinieri to you alone, is now to be granted by you to me. And so now for the first time I do thank you. O how much! Not according to the capacity of the puny Marsilio, but to that of a larger man, Lorenzo—no, rather I thank you as the greatest of giants, the divine Christopher who is as much greater than Atlas, as he who upholds the heavens is greater than the heavens. For Atlas is said to have supported the heavens on his shoulders but Christopher is said to have supported the Creator of Heaven on his.

I pray by night and day[3] to this heavenly giant to sustain my patron among the changing currents of public life on the same shoulders on which he bore his own patron through the waters.

Farewell.[2]

13th January, 1474.[4]
Florence.

[1] ms esses, quae tota
[2] ms cognovi statim, quo
[3] ms sustinuisse. Diurnis praeterea
[4] ms Ianuarii mcccclxxiv. Florentiae.

25

Amatoria

Matters of love

Lorenzo de' Medici to Marsilio Ficino, the Platonist: greetings.

MOST learned Marsilio, I now believe to be true[1] what Plotinus, if I remember rightly, said about the soul,[1] and what you set down in your book on theology; that our souls are everywhere at the same time. For what was proved in several ways in that book is now confirmed more clearly in reality, for scarcely had I sealed another letter to you when your letter that I so wanted was delivered to me, filled with that sweetness which made me so long for it.

I believe that while you were away you read my letter and noted my complaint about your slowness in writing. Warned by this you no longer put off sending a reply to me. Whatever the truth may be, I have now no desire to seek your reasons for writing; it is enough to have received your letter, and nothing could bring me greater pleasure or delight.

I see what I have realised before, that you do nothing by chance; for the long wait has made its sweetness sweeter, as often happens to the really thirsty. Reading your letter, I find it in no way unMarsilian, except for the expression of gratitude. For this kind of gratitude would not seem to befit either our friendship or the man who has surrendered himself to me so completely that he has left nothing for himself. Not if your stature equalled that which the divine Christopher is depicted as having, would you have anything which is not mine; so you once willed; such was once your pleasure. I have wholeheartedly accepted this truly noble gift; I rejoice in the acceptance and count myself fortunate indeed. You therefore belong not to Marsilio but to your Lorenzo, who is no less yours than you are your own. In which case, if you wish to be restored to yourself know that it will be on the condition that whenever you take account of yourself you must equally take account of me at the same time. For those whom immortal God has joined together let no man put asunder. Therefore, to return to thanks, I do not wish you to employ this style of writing with me any more. For if the thanks which you bestow are not yours, you give me

[1] ms Marsili veram illam

nothing at all; if they are yours you must realise, as I have already explained, that you long ago surrendered everything of yours to me with yourself.

Farewell and love yourself, for in so doing you will love me also. This our exceptional love demands, as I think you well know, since in that book you wrote about love you have so skilfully described every state of love that nothing may be discovered in love which cannot be read in that book; nor may anything be read there which is not in love.

Again, farewell.

20th January, 1473.[2]
Pisa.

[2] ms Pisis 13 calendas Februarias, 1473.

26

Mirabilium auctor Deus est, non homo

God, not man, is the author of wonders

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

I DO not know what to do now, Lorenzo; for your wonderful letter fills me with such admiration, that only philosophical modesty prevents me from crying out. Your exceptional humanity and your noble qualities arouse in me the deepest gratitude, which your letter discourages me from expressing. Allow me at least, I entreat you, my Lorenzo, to give thanks to Almighty God, that in our times he decided[1] to unite, in a citizen of ample fortune, a modest disposition with an illustrious mind. In a young man as a private citizen, he combined prudence with power; in a man of power, restraint with freedom; in a man of affairs, wisdom with eloquence. Great qualities are in you, Lorenzo, without doubt. Lest anyone suspect the vice of flattery, which should be quite alien to a man who is both philosopher

[1] ms quod statuerit temporibus

and dear friend, I say these great qualities are in you, but do not originate from you. For such wonders are the work of omnipotent God alone. Excellent man, you are the instrument of God, fitted to perform great deeds. I know what I am saying. You will therefore continue to perform successfully these wonderful works, so long as you obey the divine creator. But, believe me, your obedience will be complete if you often ask him to show you the way to obey. If you ask, he will surely show you. Indeed he prompts you to ask before you do so. He shows you not only what to ask, but how to ask it.

Farewell, O hope of your country. Before I end, however, I beseech you, my Lorenzo, both in the name of the Academy, which flourishes through you, and in the name of your country which is dear to you before all else, that you should take care of your health. Unless you are well, I think that neither the Academy[1] nor your country can prosper in these times.

21st January, 1474.
Florence.

27

Laudes Laurentii Medicis mirae

The astonishing glories of Lorenzo de' Medici

Marsilio Ficino to Niccolo Michelozzi, a true man: greetings.

O HOW difficult it now is, my Niccolo, how very difficult not to be consumed with envy! I for my part, Niccolo, would perhaps be unable to avoid being envious of so many magnificent qualities in a young man, which are usually associated with age, were it not that Lorenzo's qualities are mine also. Tell me, friend, who speaks more eloquently? Who appraises more shrewdly? Who soothes more gently? Who stirs men

more passionately? Poets, you have long since awarded him the laurel; orators, you have recently done likewise; now let us philosophers do the same. By Jupiter, how is it that easy-going veterans are overcome so quickly, so easily, and so completely, by this hustling youngster?

But[1] let others direct their envy elsewhere and be consumed by its gnawing. I for my part greatly rejoice and delight in what is my own; for[2] Lorenzo belongs to me, through his unbelievable humanity. I also am Lorenzo's, because of the incomparable gift of his soul; he has bought me at a great price, that is, himself.

May God love me, Niccolo! I speak the truth when I say that no one was closer or dearer to me than the great Cosimo. I recognised in that old man not human virtue, but the virtue of a Hero.[1] I now acknowledge within this young man all the qualities of the old man. I see the Phoenix in the Phoenix, the light in the sunbeam. That splendour of Cosimo now shines daily from our Lorenzo in many forms, bringing light to the Latin people and glory to the Florentine Republic.[2] But enough of this for the present.

Now Lorenzo was asking in his letter whose thanks I had conveyed to him, mine or another's. Reply to him on my behalf that I wished him God's grace.[3] For I pray that those three Graces described by Orpheus,[4] namely splendour, joy and vigour, will support our Medici; that is, splendour of intellect, joy in the exercise of will, vigour and prosperity of body. These Graces now inspire Lorenzo from on high, and they will do so as long as he only acknowledges that he has freely[3] received these favours from God alone.

Farewell.

21st January, 1473.
Florence.

[1] ms superantur, Sed invideant
[2] ms meus est
[3] ms agnoscet gratis solum

28

Amatoria

Matters of love

Lorenzo de' Medici to the Platonic Philosopher, Marsilio Ficino: greetings.

How wrong was my judgment of you, and how right the old saying 'Out of sight, out of mind'.[1] [a] Who would have believed it? Indeed, I can scarcely believe my own eyes. I sent two letters to you; you sent scarcely one to me, and it was so sparing in words that if you leave out the greetings at the start, the farewell at the end, the date and address, there is almost nothing left. Should a philosopher be talkative, or should he be mute? Certainly, Terence gives us this precept, which he is said to have got[1] from the Greeks: 'Nothing to excess'[2]. No, I see even at this distance the reason that I am out of your thoughts. When you have every day before your eyes the divine Christopher, to whom your church is dedicated, his body looms so large that it prevents you seeing anything else, and causes, as it were, an eclipse between us.

Yet I am amazed and I really cannot find the words with which to accuse you, for there is no word so harsh or so abusive that Marsilian taciturnity does not far surpass it. By this you have betrayed your faith and our friendship. I am indeed hurt in your breaking faith with me, and by the blow you have dealt to our friendship. But much more wounding still is that, in setting the love between us at naught, you have separated me from the good will of all other men, and there seems no one left now to whom I can entrust my faith. For there appeared to be nothing so perfect, so constant, so true, as our friendship which had grown by your virtue and the passage of time, to such an extent[2] that, if this is now bankrupt, there is no friendship left in which I can safely trust.

Know therefore that my anger towards you is exceedingly fierce: yet it is not so fierce that should one of your wonderful letters at last arrive, it

[1] ms Graecis accepisse traditur

[2] ms diuturnitate adeo creverat

[a] Locorum, scilicet, intervallum ut ab oculis disiungit, ita nos ab amorum cogitationibus separare.

could not soothe all my[3] resentment and bitterness by its incredible sweetness. For since you have in your hands the spear of Achilles,[3] the delay in writing being the point with which you pierce me, know that a letter from you could so heal the wound that has been inflicted, that it would not only cure the wound itself, but even remove all trace of a scar.

Farewell.

Pisa.

[3] ms animi nostri asperitatem

29

Amatoria; quomodo amandus quisque sit et quomodo laudandus

Matters of love; how each man should be loved and how praised

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

THAT you esteem me, Lorenzo, I have known for a long time, since you have given me many clear proofs. That you love me I have recently realised from this sign in particular; that you get angry, as though you were jealous, at the most trifling and imaginary offences. Get angry if you like, jealous man; provided you get passionate. The fire of anger and the fire of love are alike; for when I become angry with you, which I often do, then I burn with the fire of love. You too are on fire with no ordinary passion; I know what I am saying. And if ever we appear to grow cool, even so, our coolness burns with more heat than the passion of others; and our hatred, by Jupiter, is more loving and more lovable than their love.[1] For, my Lorenzo, your anger seems to me more soothing than the kindness of others. Your bite is sweeter than sweetness. Oh how sweetly you

[1] ms caeterorum fervor. Odiumque nostrum proh Jupiter amantius amabiliusque est quam caeterorum amor.

bite, how sharply you kiss! You mingle a magic sweetness with the sharp, and a sharpness with the sweet, as does Nature in the most succulent tastes. And as your sharpness grows more bitter, so, like wine vinegar, it smells more sweet.

What fault do you find in me, stringent accuser, most stringent lover? Is it not brevity? But you are the cause. The scale of your affairs makes me brief, but the greatness of your love makes me appear briefer still. You accuse my silence, suspecting that it springs from forgetfulness, and forgetfulness from absence. But you ought to remember that if Lorenzo is not absent, neither is Marsilio, for Marsilio dwells in Lorenzo if the soul is everywhere at the same time, as you yourself truly proved in your recent letter.

How, therefore, does the divine Christopher prevent me from seeing you? Especially since he is clear and transparent, and in Christopher I see Lorenzo, just as through Lorenzo I see and embrace Christopher. Do you want me to confess the truth? The eclipse which prevents me from seeing or being heard is not caused by the interposition of Christopher. No, it is you with your flashing lightning and thunderclaps that have stunned me, and rendered me blind and speechless.

Ah! Impudent young man, you triumph overmuch in your victory, however fairly won; for what more do you leave for yourself, or anyone else? For you, that you conquer yourself; for others that they allow themselves to be conquered with equanimity. Certainly, if I may speak for myself, I rejoice at being overcome by you almost as much as you rejoice at overcoming me and others.

What shall I say of the rest? The morning sun gathers the clouds, and the mid-day sun disperses them. Youthful virtue arouses envy, but virtue in a mature man dissolves it and overcomes that jealousy which previously dominated every other idea. You have converted almost everyone's envy to admiration. Many now openly praise Lorenzo who previously envied him. But although hardly anyone who praises Lorenzo speaks falsely, no-one except the Platonists praise him justly. Since the Aristotelians see Lorenzo so successful in whatever he does, they praise him in all things; on the other hand the Platonists praise all things in him. For when they consider how quickly he has become master of each art, they realise that these arts have not been acquired by labour, but supplied by nature and granted from God.

And so it is that I esteem your character in myself, and I love my own in you. I praise you in art, and I value art in you. I honour you in nature, and

I marvel at nature in you. I revere you through God, and I reverence God through you. And so to God alone be all glory sung from age to age[2] by everyone.

Farewell.

[2] ms aevo canatur in aevum

30

Iocosa ad Ioannem invitatio ad reditum, per dissimulationem

A playful inducement to Giovanni to return, by means of dissimulation

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

TONIGHT I had decided to write to you in the morning like this: 'Come back, my hero! Hurry![1] Fly to me, I beg you!'

Then, on more mature reflection, I deemed it wiser to dissemble my longing so that you would return all the more speedily, thinking me angry. Well, I am! But what's the point? Will anger stir him whom love has not moved? I don't think so. So I don't know which way to turn—to entreaty or to scolding.

Ah! Now I have found a refuge. I shall trust in that heroic heart of yours which usually moves more quickly of its own volition than when spurred. Meanwhile, how shall I stop myself grumbling at you just a little, you who are so unmindful of me? But I shall hold back my complaints and, not to bore you with the same old tunes, I shall embark on matters of greater moment. I shall write about affairs of state. You ask what is going on in town. Serious matters are afoot. Listen! But tell no one! Many of the chief citizens are saying: 'Oh Marsilio! why have you been alone in town for so long?'

'Because the man who never leaves me on my own, so wishes it.'

'He has not returned, then?'

[1] ms Heros, propera quaeso

'Not yet.'

I have nothing more[2] to write to you at present. I have written about the state of affairs in town; now it is for you to write about the country.

Stay! I have blundered! I do not require you to write, but to speak of them. If we speak together, my hero, we speak about the same things; if we write, we write about different ones; I write from memory, Giovanni, and you from forgetfulness.

Now I wish I had not said that. My friend has not forgotten me because he has not forgotten himself. Look, he has already granted my prayer. Here he comes. Yes, he comes! Run to meet him, lucky feet. Embrace him, fortunate arms.

[2] ms habeo ad praesens.

31

Epistola genialis de heroibus

A letter about heroes written as the spirit moved[a]

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

I RECEIVED a letter from Carlo Marsuppini. As soon as I began to reply and wanted to write 'Marsilio sends greetings to Carlo,' a spirit[b] deflected my pen from this purpose,[1] so that I wrote 'Giovanni' instead of 'Carlo'. Receive, then, a letter, written as the spirit moved me.[c]

God thought it wrong, when I was away, for me to write to anyone, before I wrote to a hero. I believe that the heavenly powers[2] protect heroes since, in Plato's view, heroes are born from the love of the gods.[1] And I know by direct experience that philosophers are reborn from the love of heroes.

Farewell.

1st May, 1473.

[1] ms praeter sententiam ita
[2] ms favere superos. Quoniam
[a] genialis
[b] genius
[c] genialem

32

Quod gratis fit,[1] gratius est, quam quod ex debito

What is done freely is more pleasing than an act of obligation

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

THE hand could not guide the pen were it not itself moved by the soul. Marsilio could not now write to his hero were he not first so invited by his hero. But, one thing that troubles me more than anything else is that you write to me because you promised; and that I attribute to a bargain and not to love.

I desire letters of love, not of barter; or[2] are you really mine by contract? Because I am yours through love, I wish you to be mine through love too.

Farewell.

5th June, 1474.

[1] ms gratis fit, gratius
[2] ms an ne es

33

Provocatio ad scribendum

A challenge to write

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

MY FRIEND, why do we rival one another so long in silence? What gain is there for the victor in that? What loss to the vanquished? Indeed, I

considered it better to be conquered by you in this test of silence, so that I might win in a contest of words. Then the principal silent part will be given to you, and the principal speaking one to me!

Do you always need spurs on the racecourse? Will you ever[1] run willingly? Why so hard on me? Perhaps I seem to jest with you rather sharply, my dear Giovanni, but you are acting extremely sharply. Well, be sharp, if you like . . . only answer! If you will not reply, remain sweet in your silence. Remember that the affection of my heart, which is sweeter than honey, underlies the sharpness of my words.

Farewell! And be away as long as your affairs demand. Since they are your affairs, that is sufficient for me.

7th October.
Careggi.

[1] ms stadio? Nunquid tua

34

Quod necessariae epistolae inter amicos

Letters are necessary between friends

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

SINCE I thought you would soon return to Florence I did not send you any letters, hoping that I would shortly hear the sound of your voice, and you that of mine. But now this continuing fine weather warns me that you will stay longer in the Trebbian hills. For who is not overcome by the charm of Trebbio? Certainly Bacchus loves those hills,[1] and now my Giovanni is enchanted by them; and this is indeed why I have not written before.

But how is it that you don't write? You will say that you have nothing

to write about. At least write that you have nothing to say; although there is always a reason[1] for a letter to friends. What is dearer to a friend than the life of his friend? For this reason they should frequently write to each other about the state of their health. I cannot reveal to you[2] my state of health unless I hear first of yours. Certainly I am well if you are; or rather, if I know that you are.

Farewell from Careggi.

19th September, 1468.[3]

[1] ms amicis causa literarum
[2] ms meam tibi valitudinem
[3] ms adds XIII Kalendas Octobris 1468

35

Gravis est iactura temporis

Loss of time is a serious matter

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

THE care of my own sick body and that of my father is one burden for me. Your absence is another. Both must be borne with equanimity, lest they become more burdensome through impatience. If you have any humanity, do not add to my double burden yet a third; you do so unless you return the books. It is the loss of time that makes me ask for them so often. No loss is more serious than that. Alas that I ask so boldly for things I do not really want to receive; but for what I do want, I dare not ask.

It is right that I should have the former, while at present it is necessary for me to be without the latter. It is prudent to do what is right and,[1] as far

[1] ms tum quod decens

as one can, to make what is necessary[2] voluntary. The first is for you and the second for me to attempt.

Farewell, and while you are looking after other people's possessions, take care of yourself; for their sake and your own.

[2] ms tum quod necessarium

36

Quod iocundae amicorum literae

Friends' letters are a source of joy

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti: greetings.

Now what shall I do? Shall I be the first to write? Or shall I wait for a letter from you? Although I am hardly ever the first to write to anyone, now I am compelled to make the first approach and commence the battle. I shall not allow you to be silent any longer. For you can only be silent as long as I am inactive.

The extreme heat, as you know, drove me here and now an intolerable wind is driving me back again, so that today I can scarcely stop myself from flying back to the city immediately. You alone can keep me here for a few days, but only a very few, with one of your letters, for when wholly absorbed in reading them I neither feel tempest nor hear thunder. Thus may words calm winds and disperse storms.

Give my greetings to your Ugolino Verino, the priest of the Muses.

Farewell.

30th August, 1468.[1]
Marciano.

[1] ms 30 Augusti 1468

37

Nemini detrahendum, quia Deus ulciscitur

No one should be disparaged, because God brings vengeance

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

HOMER, having been deprived of his sight because of his censure of the divine Helen, is said never to have seen again, because he never realised that he was wrong. Stesichorus,[1] blinded for the same reason, saw his mistake. As a result, he sang a palinode, that is a song to the contrary, saying, 'That was not a true story; you neither fled in the tall ships nor went to Troy.' Again, when Socrates had spoken against the God of Love, he was reproached by his guardian spirit while crossing the river Illisis.[2] Before anything unfortunate happened to him he expiated his offence, rendered praise to the God whom he had previously censured[1] and went safely on his way. Thus Stesichorus was more prudent than Homer, but Socrates was wiser than both. I was indeed less careful than Socrates, but I hope[2] I shall not be more unfortunate than Stesichorus.

What is all this leading to? Why, that I wrote a letter to you on the seventh of this month, early in the morning, with the intention of blaming you for your long silence. In it I accused you of being obdurate, as though you were more hard-hearted than anybody else. In the evening I became sick and am not yet recovered. Therefore, fearing that some misfortune threatens me for insulting a hero, I have decided to write a palinode, though only brief, to make amends for my fault.

I say that you are not a hard-hearted deity but rather that I am tender-hearted and to the tender-hearted firmness often looks like rudeness. This is my palinode. May it cancel out my previous song and also make the opposite request. For I previously begged you to send me, if you so pleased, sharp-worded letters rather than none at all. Now, on the other

[1] ms quem ante vituperaverat
[2] ms fui, utinam non

hand, I ask you for no letters rather than sharp ones, for the sick heart needs comforting, not goading.

Farewell.

15th October, 1468.
Florence.

38

Homo est animus. Amantis animus est in amato

Man is spirit. The spirit of the lover is in the beloved

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

I HAVE often looked for myself, Giovanni. First I have touched my chest with my hands, then I have often gazed at this face in the mirror, but I could never say that I have touched myself with the one or seen myself in the other. For, when I seek myself, I am certainly not looking for another but for him who seeks. Indeed, it is exactly the same Marsilio that is both seeker and sought.

Who does the seeking? He who wishes to discover. Who wants to discover? He who knows that there is something worth looking for. Who knows this? Why, spirit[a] alone. So it is spirit alone I seek, since I seek myself, who am indeed pure spirit. This I well know can neither be touched nor seen. For we would not be in doubt about its nature for so long, if it were accessible to these senses. Then, too, whenever I have drawn the sharp sight of the mind back to itself, hoping that I might see myself in this way, I have by no means thus attained what I desired. For in this inward search I find neither much delight nor rest. Yet he who discovers what he is looking for, at once rejoices and is at rest. Thus I do not find myself in myself.

But if I am to look for myself in another, how may I lay hold of myself if I do not possess my own self? For it is through myself alone that I

[a] animus

apprehend what I can apprehend. Return then, and render yourself—or rather, myself—back to me, since I cannot do it. Return today, and do not always delay until tomorrow. I beseech you, do not let me number off more days with black pebbles;[1] for those which now you calmly spend away, though they be fine for you, make dark my day.

Farewell.

39

Seria ad Ioannem. Anima post mortem intelligit, et multo clarius quam in corpore

Serious words to Giovanni. The soul perceives after death, and much more clearly than when in the body

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

I HAVE written to you several letters, my dearest friend, in which I have attempted the style of love; which indeed is fitting for our friendship and which in its freedom and purity is no different from that of Socrates and Plato. But now, after loving jests in the Platonic style (for this is how Plato introduces his writings) we must come to serious matters. Listen now to the discussion we had once regarding the mind with those excellent citizens and lawyers Bernardo Giugni and Bartolomeo Fortini.

There are two main questions which people have about mind. The first is whether the intellect can be separated from the body, and whether it can live and operate once the body has been laid aside. The second is, if it does then understand anything, whether it understands clearly or not. We shall now reply to these questions as briefly as possible, for they and similar ones are discussed at great length in our *Theology on the Immortality of Souls*.[1] We admit that the intellect can apprehend many incorporeal things, such as God, angels, souls, virtues, numerical proportions, ideas

and universal principles. But just as we cannot distinguish the invisible through sight, so neither can we reflect on things incorporeal through any bodily means. Nor can we through a nature confined to body, space and time, enquire into, seek, discover or retain those things that are not bound by matter, space and time. But if the mind, while still in control of the body, becomes collected in itself, so that it may observe some things[1] through itself alone, it follows that when it is separated from the body it is able to observe much more, and much more easily through its own self. If it can function by itself, then it must also be able to exist and to live by itself.

And to take the second question: the mind without the body will observe more clearly what is presented to it for its understanding from within, than the senses now observe what is presented to them from outside to be sensed. And it will do so at least as much more clearly as sight is more acute and faster than hearing and the other senses, and as mind is superior to sense, and the objects of mind to the objects of sense. No one who uses the powers of the mind doubts that mind is superior to sense, for he sees that mind is the judge of the senses, and that being more precious it is granted to fewer beings, takes longer to train and is used less frequently. This shows that the objects of mind also are more sublime than the objects of sense, because they are universal, vast and eternal, whereas those of sense are particular, limited and mortal. It may be added that the more we concentrate on external sense, the more is the internal sense withdrawn, and vice versa. For he who looks and listens attentively can scarcely imagine at the same time, and he who imagines a great deal scarcely sees or hears what is happening around him. The same relation exists between the imagination and the intellect.

The soul in this body has two principal impediments. First, it is drawn into many activities and much agitation, and its different activities weaken and obstruct each other, for it is very hard to apply the mind to different things at the same time. Secondly, the soul is engaged in inferior activities much earlier, more attentively and more often than in higher ones, not only because of the condition of its abysmal dwelling but also because of the corporeal service assigned to men for a time by God. And so it is that when we wish to consider the incorporeal, we function for the most part feebly, and perceive it dimly as though through a cloud. But whenever the actions of eating, accumulating, feeling or imagining either entirely cease or are greatly reduced, then the vision of the mind will be corre-

[1] ms speculetur aliqua per

spondingly sharpened, so that whatever is observed by the mind is observed more clearly under the power of this light. Then indeed the soul will observe through itself, and it will see that light of the intellect more clearly than it now sees the light of the senses through the glass windows of this bodily prison. Entirely at peace, it will perceive through its own perfect transparency the highest impressions in the light of the divine sun. So bright is that light, that the light of this sun becomes a shadow in comparison, and because it is so clear it is hidden from impure eyes but fully manifest to those that are pure. Nor will the mind then gaze as if at painted images, but rather at real objects, of which all other things are images.

When in sleep the workings and movements of the external senses cease, then the imagination, which is fed by the rest of the senses, gathers so much strength that it paints pictures internally, which seem to represent what is real. What therefore will the intellect, which is so much more powerful than the imagination, do when it has escaped free from impediments to a far greater extent than the imagination of the dreaming man, and in pure truth and reason perceives the true principles of everything? Certainly it will then depict within itself with the greatest precision all that is true; or rather, it will receive the image of all that is true from everywhere. But from where, chiefly? From the mind of minds,[2] from the light of lights. How easily does this come about? Very easily. For because of a natural kinship between the two, visible light instantaneously illumines a transparent substance as soon as this substance becomes still and pure; such light gives this substance its own form, through which it gives it the forms of all things visible. In the same way the intelligible—indeed more than intelligible—light which is God forms that transparent substance of the intellect as soon as that substance becomes still; I say it gives this substance its own form, that is the divine, and through this the forms of all things intelligible.

And just as God has already imparted his bounteous light, so immediately he imparts life-giving warmth and joy, thus bestowing life, free from death. And just as he has shed into physical matter light unmixed with darkness so he has shed light into the mind beyond any limit of time, by which it rises from the currents of time to the stillness of eternity. Moreover, He ever nourishes the mind with goodness, to its content. For God draws the desire of the mind to Himself by filling it with beauty, and by drawing desire to Himself he fulfils it. Where there is good without evil

[2] ms a mente mentum lumine

there is fullness without surfeit, and through infinite goodness there arises infinite capacity. Thus infinite goodness and beauty, the source of innumerable forms of goodness and beauty, equally attract and fulfil the mind in eternity.

40

Contra Averroem, scilicet, quod non sit unicus hominum intellectus

Against Averroes on the grounds that there is not a single human intellect

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

Averroes held that all men share a single intellect,[1] by which every man understands what any man understands. This opinion is pronounced quite natural by those who are more eager for novelty than truth. I agree, but I call it natural for this reason only: that, as is the way of natural things, it is quite unstable and is disposed of by its opposite. The very fact that someone holds a different view immediately shakes the ground under Averroes' feet.

There cannot be opposite opinions in one intellect at the same time. Therefore, if the same intellect in an Averroic philosopher and in a Platonist holds the opposite views about itself, the former saying that there is one intellect, and the latter that there are many, it is quite plain that within them there is more than one intellect. And in these[1] matters of will and intelligence, is there not at any one time the greatest diversity among men? For at the same time, some affirm and others deny the same thing; some want it, others do not.

What else shall we say about these opposing attitudes? In one man the intellect is very learned, and in another, untaught; in this man just and

[1] ms in his quae

honourable, in that unjust and dishonourable; here happy, there miserable. It cannot therefore be the same intellect in all men. If the intellects of men are diverse, their souls are much more so.

Consider also, that if there is one intellect and always has been, as Averroes has it, it is unlikely to be so ignorant of itself that in nearly all men, except Averroes, it should have always thought itself to be many, and should still think so. What is more natural for the mind than self-knowledge? Why then does the mind, in considering Averroes' opinion, never or rarely accept it, unless it be that the opinion is false?

Lastly, whenever we consider the unity of mind, we find it repugnant and turn to plurality, if only for the desire to survive. But this single mind could only repudiate anything if it could repudiate its own unity, which alone can comprehend it. But it is unbelievable that something eternal and divine could always loathe, despise and reject its own nature.

Why should I go on? We discussed these things together more than enough when I was your guest at Regnano and we were writing that great work on Theology.[2]

Farewell.

16th April.
Florence.

41

Theologi vigilant, caeteri somniant

Theologians are awake; the rest dream

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

Some people wonder why we follow Plato with such respect, when he continually seems to be involved with paradoxes and myths. However, in my opinion, they would cease to wonder if they were to consider that divine things alone truly exist, because those things are not impaired by contact with any outside influence, nor do they ever change their state.

Physical bodies are not in the least real, but they seem to be since they are afflicted by opposing forces and are constantly undergoing change. However, this is the very reason why they are not true, but are images or shadows of what is true.

Now, while nearly all other philosophers were devoted to natural studies alone and were asleep in these images as if they were true, our Plato, attending to the divine, was the only one awake; or at least was much more so than anyone else. That is why I believe it is so much better to follow Plato as a theologian than other philosophers; just as it is better to entrust oneself to helmsmen[1] that are awake, rather than to those that are asleep.

Farewell.

42

Veritas Dei splendor, pulchritudo, amor

The truth of God is splendour, beauty, and love

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

It was the chief work of the divine Plato, as the dialogues of Parmenides and Epinomis show, to reveal the principle of unity in all things, which he called appropriately the One itself.[1] He also asserted that in all things there is one truth, that is the light of the One itself, the light of God, which is poured into all minds and forms, presenting the forms to the minds and joining the minds to the forms. Whoever wishes to profess the study of Plato should therefore honour the one truth, which is the single ray of the one God. This ray passes through angels, souls, the heavens and other bodies. As we discussed in the book on love,[2] its splendour shines in every individual thing according to its nature and is called grace and beauty; and where it shines more clearly, it especially attracts[1] the man who is watching, stimulates him who thinks, and catches and possesses him who draws near to it. This ray also compels him to revere its splendour

[1] ms praecipue allicit intuentem

more than all else, as if it were a divine spirit, and, once his former nature has been cast aside, to strive for nothing else but to become this splendour.

This is plain, because[2] the lover is not content with the sight or touch of the beloved[3] and continually exclaims, 'I do not know what this man has that sets me on fire, nor do I understand what I desire.' The soul, consumed by the divine brilliance which shines in the beauteous man as though in a mirror,[3] is seized unknowingly by that brilliance, and is drawn upward as by a hook, so that the soul becomes God. Then must a man be considered mad as well as miserable, who whilst thus[4] called to the sublime through vision, plunges himself into the mire through touch.[4] Although he could become God instead of man by contemplating the divine through human beauty, from man he returns to beast by preferring the physical shadow of form to true spiritual beauty.

[2] ms patet, quoniam amator
[3] ms tactuve amati, hominis
[4] ms dum adeo per

43

Ideae secundum Platonem in divina mente sunt

Ideas, according to Plato, exist in the divine mind

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

Our Plato in the *Timaeus*, following and supporting Timaeus, the Pythagorean,[1] tells us that the world is begotten of God. He shows us the threefold cause of this creation;[2] its efficient cause, its final cause and its formal cause. He has it that the world was made by God's power through the grace of His goodness, as a model of divine wisdom. As the design of a whole building and of its parts exists in the mind of an architect, so the design of this whole world and of its parts exists in the divine intelligence beyond the world. That world beyond he calls the world of intelligence, and eternal; this world he calls the world of senses, and temporal. The models of things in this world he calls ideas in the divine intelligence, and

the resemblances of the divine intelligence in this world he calls images and shadows.

And so we may by all means ridicule those ignorant people who so foolishly proclaim that Plato wrongly asserted that universal ideas and principles are separated not only from physical bodies, but also from the divine intelligence and even from each other, like little clouds scattered through the air by the wind. But since we produced many arguments against these people in the books we wrote at your house in Regnano, let it suffice for now to follow what Plato says[1] in the *Timaeus*.

Let us first consider,[3] he says, what is usually asked before anything else in questions about the universe—whether it has always existed without beginning or whether it had an origin. Clearly it can be seen and touched and is physical. All things of this kind affect the senses, and are known through them. It is agreed that such things are being and have been created. Now that which is created must, as we affirm, of necessity be created by a cause. It is indeed difficult to find the maker and father of the world and, when you have found him, it is impossible to describe him to ordinary people.

Let us consider again whether the maker of the world followed a model that is always one and always the same, or whether we should say he followed one that has been created. If the world is beautiful and its creator is good, he would have preferred to follow an eternal model; if otherwise, which would be blasphemous to admit, he would have followed a finite model in place of the eternal. Since in truth the world is the most beautiful of all things that are begotten and its author the best of all causes, there is no doubt that he followed a model without beginning or end. So the creation is brought forth according to that model[2] which may be understood by reason and wisdom alone, and which abides unchanging. Thus it must follow that this world is an image of the other.

A little later on Plato adds:[4] And now we may explain for what reason the author of all things willed creation and this universe. He was good, and the good is never touched by any shadow of envy. Since envy was so foreign to him, he wished all things to become as like him as they could. Should anyone accept this from prudent men as the first cause of the creation of the world, he would be quite right to do so.

A little further on Plato adds:[5] It should also be said that this world is a living and intelligent being created by divine providence. Let us see what

[1] ms nunc testimonia solum

[2] ms ad idem effectus

follows from this. What being did God make the world like? We do not think that he made it like any particular species of being. For if it had been made like an imperfect being, it would certainly not be beautiful; but on the contrary we believe it was made like that being of whom other beings both individually and by kind are parts. The world of divine intelligence certainly encompasses within itself every living being which can be perceived by the mind alone, just as this world contains us and all other creatures perceived by the senses. Now God, wishing to make this world in every way like the most beautiful and most perfect of all beings, containing within its limits all creatures appropriate to its nature, caused it to be brought under His gaze.

Are we right to say that there is one world? Would it not be more correct to say that there are many, or indeed innumerable worlds? In truth there is one, since it is formed in the image of one. Because it contains all living beings that may be comprehended, it can have no companion. For otherwise there would have to be another being which contained these two, and to whom these two parts belonged. And then this world could not rightly be said to be a copy of such worlds but of this third one. So that this world should be most like that Absolute Being in its unity, neither two, nor an infinite number of worlds, were created, but one only-begotten world has ever been, and ever will be.

Listen to Timaeus, the Pythagorean and master of Plato, who said in similar words that ideas exist in God. 'The world', he said, 'is the best of all things that have been created, since it proceeded from the most perfect creator, who looked to no hand-made models, but to an idea and to intelligible substance. The creation, made in exact and perfect accord with this idea, is without blemish and of matchless beauty. This world is at all times[3] complete as far as the senses are concerned, since its model, which contains within itself all intelligible beings, leaves nothing outside. For it is the absolute[4] measure of what is intelligible, just as this world is of what can be sensed.' Thus said Timaeus.

We have heard how the ideas of all things exist in a living and eternal model which is the most excellent of all that is intelligible, absolute and omnipresent, outside which nothing intelligible can exist. Such a model can be none other than God himself. What could be clearer than that?

When Plato said that God made all sense objects in the likeness of intelligible ones, he added that He made them in the likeness of Himself,

[3] ms est semper secundum

[4] ms intelligibilium absolutissimus, quemadmodum

the original model and God being almost the same. For truly, however many kinds of creature there are in this world, there are at least as many ideas in God. These ideas are intelligible principles through which all things are made. Created forms, which are in matter not in itself alive, either do not live or scarcely do so, but ideas have life because they are in the living God.[5] Therefore Plato says in the same book that the divine mind by the power of thought has created with his own substance as many forms in this world as he has seen ideas in his living self. This is what Plato held, Giovanni, as you have been hearing. His predecessors and those that followed him also held this. Believe Marsilio, that whoever holds otherwise does not hold to the truth.

[5] ms vivunt. Ideo Plato

44

Causa peccandi, spes, remedium

The cause of sinning; hope; the remedy

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

SINCE souls are divine, why do they live such unholy lives? Because they inhabit an unholy house in an unholy land. Some go astray through lack of care or knowledge, and there is nothing to wonder at in that, insofar as we live in the murky sediment of this world. Others err through too great a love for the body, and that is not strange either, since the body is the companion and child of the soul. Yet others fail through lack of trust, either in immortality or in divine mercy—and what wonder, since they live their lives in a region of death and cruelty? Others again fail because of over-confidence in the divine mercy, or that all will be put right tomorrow. Both lack of trust and over-confidence are very dangerous: the first torments a man, the second deceives him.

The essence of prudence, therefore, is always to use the present moment as well as we can, and our sole refuge is to commit ourselves constantly to

God. This done, the best hope is to remember that God understands how difficult and dangerous is the province which he has given us to live in and govern. Infinite goodness rises far above finite evil. God has ordained various degrees of chastisement and penance, for the particular good of the individual, and for the common good. But he has also established many degrees of rich reward.

45

Quos Deus coniunxit moribus, coniunget fœlicitate

Whom God has joined together in a way of life, he will join in happiness

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

YESTERDAY at Novoli we celebrated the holy day of Saint Christopher and Saint James. I said 'holy', Giovanni, and I would certainly have added 'feast', if you had been there. Without you it was no feast for me. See how dear you are to your Marsilio, for whom, if one may say so, not even heavenly things have any value without you. This is just, for he who has joined Christopher and James in one holy festival, has likewise joined Marsilio and Giovanni in life. And the same spirit[a] or a very similar one guides us both. God has ordained, I believe, that we should live on earth with a single will and similar way of life and in heaven under the same principle[b] and in an equal degree of happiness.

Farewell, Achates[1] of our voyage, at once our haven and delight.

[a] genius
[b] idea

46

Praestantior est legum conditor, quam sophista

The lawgiver is superior to the sophist

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

THE Greeks once admired the power of expression, memory and sharpness of intellect in Carneades[1] and, as you say, your friends praise the same qualities in Giovanni Guidi, and often call him Carneades because of a certain likeness. But you say he follows in the tradition of Lycurgus[2] because of his discovery of laws. You also ask which is more praiseworthy, to be like Carneades or Lycurgus. Carneades in his arguments promoted discord, but Lycurgus resolved it. The cleverness of Carneades was more often useless than useful; indeed it was seldom useful to anyone anywhere. The teaching of Lycurgus is always[1] useful and necessary everywhere to all men. Finally, insofar as it is better to live well than talk well and to be happy than seem to be, so far is the talent of Lycurgus more excellent than that of Carneades.

But hear from Herodotus[3] how perfect is the author of laws, for he writes that when Lycurgus first entered the Temple of Apollo the priestess uttered these verses:

> 'O Lycurgus, beloved of heavenly Zeus and all the gods
> Who come to our rich temple,
> I know not whether to pronounce you man or god.
> I think rather that you are a god, Lycurgus.'

Read this letter to our friend Priore Pandolfini. I know the character of the man. I know he will confirm what I have written.

Farewell, and remain a friend of Giovanni Guidi.

[1] ms disciplina semper utilis

47

Legitimus amoris terminus est consuetudo

The lawful end of love is union

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

You ask what chiefly caused me to write letters about love. There are very many men, Giovanni, who in speaking or writing on matters of love stray a long way from its law. But a mistake of this kind is as harmful as lawful love is useful; and love has as many forms as there are lovers. In truth all men love; men, I say, Giovanni, for he who loves no one is not a man. So not only in the book which I have written on love[1] but also in my letters, I have pointed out for those who love the mark to which they should advance. Since the man who oversteps this mark is his own real enemy, he can be no true friend to others. He alone will keep[1] to the right mark in speaking or writing, who first keeps to it in thinking. But he will keep to it in thinking who knows both what true beauty is and what is not true but its imitation. The right end of loving is union,[a] which consists in these three: thinking, seeing and hearing.

Certainly, love (as all philosophers define it) is the longing for beauty.[2] The beauty of the body lies not in the shadow of matter, but in the light and grace of form; not in dark mass, but in clear proportion; not in sluggish and senseless weight, but in harmonious number and measure. But we come to that light, that grace, proportion, number and measure only through thinking, seeing and hearing. It is thus far that the true passion of a true lover extends. However, it is not love when the appetite of the other senses drives us rather towards matter, mass, weight and the deformity that is the opposite of beauty or love, but a stupid, gross and ugly lust.

But why do I, like Socrates and Plato, consider for so long the populace rather than myself? For perhaps the more I strive to prevent the people from loving basely all the more will these insane and ungrateful[2] people suspect my love is excessive. This is said to have happened also to those

[1] ms ille servavit, qui

[2] ms insanum, ingratumque vulgus

[a] consuetudo

heroes, Socrates and Plato, our divine guides. So let that be enough on this subject; indeed it is more than enough for now.

Farewell.

48

Neque amor sine religione, neque religio sine amore laudatur

Love is not praised without religion, nor religion praised without love

Marsilio Ficino to Filippo Controni of Lucca: greetings.

I AM sending you my book on love as I promised and also my book on religion, so that you may appreciate that my love is religious and my religion full of love. Indeed, creation is so ordered that there is no true love that is not religious, nor is there any true religion but that sustained by love.

Angelo Manetti, the son of the orator Giannozzo, and the heir to his father's virtue, sends you his greetings.

49

De tolleranda iniuria

On bearing injury

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

YOU say that one of your relatives felt injured the other day by the insults of some impudent people. The man who acts unjustly, Giovanni, does in-

justice to himself; for he upsets the mind and stamps it with the mark of an evil disposition. Because of his dishonourable conduct he suffers hatred, danger and misfortune. He who accepts injury receives it from himself and not from the offender. For the rational soul—which is man himself—cannot be offended unless he considers the injustice as bad for him; and this depends on our judgment. Let therefore no man blame another, but himself; for no man can be offended but by himself, and let him who complains think how he may punish himself, that is by discipline and correction, instead of hatching punishment for the offender.

Have you not seen puppies snapping at a stone that has been thrown at them, even though it has not hit them? Although they have not been hurt by the stone they hurt their teeth when they bite it. In the same way the imprudent, when kicked by a donkey, flay the animal with their fists, or rather flay themselves. Indeed, from their opinions they receive many injuries which like balls rebound against the thrower. You will perhaps say that it is difficult not to desire vengeance. But be in no doubt that if men forgive, the most just God will settle the balance a little later. What could be easier, what more glorious than reliance on God as one's Lord and avenger, and to earn as much goodness from Him by patience, as the wicked meant to inflict injury, and thus to transform evil into good? O what a precious gift forbearance is! Socrates, the wisest among the Greeks, practised this virtue alone, and Christ, the master of Life, practised it above all others. Indeed, it is said that He descended amongst men virtually just for this.

Impatience should be condemned as much as patience should be praised. Apart from other things impatience disturbs the soul, erases past good, taints the present and constricts the future. One should not listen to the voice of the worthless crowd if it urges one to vengeance. What is the crowd? A kind of polypus;[1] that is some multilegged beast without a head.

The magnanimous man in his greatness sets small value on small things. Trivial and fleeting are all temporal things, for the past is no more, the future does not yet exist and the present is indivisible; it starts and ends at the same time.

He is not strong who succumbs to injustice, but he who overcomes injustice is. For injustice to be conquered a man has to stand firm so that he is not moved from his place by its onslaught.

Read this letter to your relative and tell him to find his remedy in reason and not expect it from time. For time is a pernicious doctor and

daily misleads the sick by their hope of the future, and before he heals old sores he adds new sorrows. Thus day by day time accumulates evil and leads man to death in a fallacious hope for life. We must live today, since he who lives for tomorrow never lives. If you desire to live now, live for God, in whom yesterday and tomorrow are nothing else but today.

Farewell.

30th March, 1474.

50

De constantia adversus fortunam comparanda

On constancy in the face of fortune

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

In Plato's book *Theaetetus on Knowledge*,[1] Socrates strengthened his friend Theodore the Geometer to resist boldly the blows of fortune, not, as was usual, with iron arms, but with arms of gold.

'It is impossible, Theodore,' he said, 'to eradicate evils altogether, for there must always be that which opposes goodness. Amongst the gods evil cannot exist, but of necessity it surrounds[1] this mortal nature, this lower region. We must therefore endeavour to escape as quickly as possible from the latter to the former.[2] But by escape I mean to render ourselves, as far as we can, similar to God. Now a man is rendered like God through prudence, piety and justice.'

How this divine principle of our Plato ought to be truly understood you shall hear in a few words. Just as God, who is the Creator of our souls, also regulates them, so is the universe both the begetter and controller of our bodies. Since the soul is the son of God[3] and the body is a limb of the universe, our souls are moved gently and easily by God, as though by a

[1] ms necessario circulunt. Ideo
[2] ms hinc illuc quam
[3] ms vero Dei filius

father, through the laws of providence; but our bodies are dragged by the universal body through the forces of fate, as a single particle is dragged by the total mass of which it is a part, under some violent[4] movement. Yet the force of fate does not penetrate the mind unless the mind of its own accord has first become submerged[5] in the body, which is subject to fate. For this reason no one ought so to trust in his own opinion and strength as to hope he may entirely avoid disease of the body and the loss of possessions. Every soul should withdraw from the encumbrance of the body and become centred in the mind, for then fate will discharge its force upon the body without touching the soul. The wise man will not struggle pointlessly with fate. He will rather resist it by flight. You cannot rout misfortune, so flee yourself. That is why Plato advises us to retreat from 'here' to 'there'—that is, from attachment to the body and involvement with worldly affairs, to the cultivation of the soul. Otherwise we cannot avoid evil.

He adds 'as quickly as possible'—I suppose for this reason, that we should from a tender age begin to separate the soul from intercourse with the body before it is submerged by daily habit. Be sure that by this escape the soul is deservedly restored to divine likeness, for it becomes like God, free from bodily taint.

Such freedom we gain principally through the three virtues of prudence, justice and piety. Prudence recognises what we owe to God and what to the world. Justice gives its due to the world, and piety its due to God. Thus the man of prudence yields his body, as a limb of the world, to the turmoil of the world wherever it happens to move it. But his soul, the offspring of God, he removes from all dealings with the body and freely commits to the guidance[6] of divine providence.

My dearest Giovanni, if we follow this golden rule of our Plato, with the wind of heaven behind us we shall circumnavigate successfully this vast whirlpool of fortune, and, quite untroubled, sail safely into harbour.

Farewell.[2]

[4] ms mole violenti quodam
[5] ms subiectum immerserit. Nemo
[6] ms arbitrio gubernandam. Hoc

51

Amicitia illa stabilis, quae a Deo conflatur

A friendship is lasting which is forged by God

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Cavalcanti, his unique friend: greetings.

My dear Giovanni, the Platonic philosophers defined true friendship as the permanent union of the lives of two men. But I think that life is one only for those men who work towards one end, as it were treading the same path towards a common goal. I believe their fellowship will only be permanent when the aim which they have set themselves as a common duty is not only single but also permanent and sure.

Now the whole study and business of Man is always to strive for what is thought to be good. Since there seem to be three kinds of good for mortals, which are those of the soul, body, and external objects, man seeks the virtue of the soul, the pleasures of the body or abundance of riches. The first of these is sure and everlasting. The other two are transitory and mortal. Therefore that permanent union of lives, which is true friendship, can only exist for those who neither seek to accumulate riches nor to satisfy sensual pleasures which change and perish. It is possible only for those who apply themselves with common zeal and determination to acquire and exercise the single and permanent virtue of the soul.

Our Plato, the master and guide of all philosophers, called this virtue of the soul wisdom. He held wisdom to be the understanding of the divine.[1] In the *Republic*[2] he shows how the divine can only be manifest to our mind if God reveals it, just as the eyes only perceive physical forms when they are illuminated by the sun.[3] Likewise it is God, whom we long to see, who illuminates the eye of the mind, so that we can understand. To the enlightened mind He then reveals Himself, delighting us by that revelation. Therefore God is for us the way, the truth and the life:[4] the way because by his rays he turns us, leads us to him and gathers us up; the truth, because when we have turned towards him, he reveals himself to us; and lastly the life, since by that blessed vision he constantly nourishes and gives joy to our soul which contemplates Him. Therefore let all who desire to taste the sweetest waters of wisdom thirst for Him, the everlasting fountain of all wisdom. All who hope to acquire the virtue of the soul must fervently seek wisdom. Thus whoever resolves to cultivate his soul must also cultivate God.

We have now defined friends as those who strive for virtue with equal zeal, and who help one another to cultivate their souls. The cultivation of the soul is established in virtue alone, virtue is wisdom, and wisdom is understanding the divine. Divine light bestows knowledge of this kind upon us. Therefore, to cultivate the soul is to cultivate God himself.

And so friendship, as it endeavours through the single aim of two men to cultivate the soul through virtue, is clearly nothing but the supreme harmony of two souls in the cultivation of God. And as God loves those who cultivate Him with devoted minds, there cannot be the two friends on their own, but there must always be three, the two men and God; God, or in other words Jupiter, the patron of hospitality, protector of friendship, and sustainer of human life, worshipped at all times by Plato and honoured by Socrates. He is the guide of human life; He unites us as one; He is the unbreakable bond of friendship, and our constant guardian.

The theologians of antiquity, whose memory we revere, are said to have entered into a sacred bond of friendship with one another, having God as their mediator. We are told that among the Persians Zoroaster,[1] by divine inspiration, adopted as his constant companion Arimaspis in his search for the holy mysteries of religious philosophy. So also among the Egyptians, Hermes Trismegistus chose Aesculapius. In Thrace, Orpheus chose Museus, and Aglaophemus, Pythagoras. Plato of Athens at first chose Dion of Syracuse and after his death, Xenocrates. So wise men have always thought it necessary to have God as their guide, and a man as companion for the safe and peaceful completion of the heavenly journey.

And although I have little confidence in being able to follow the footsteps of these men through the heavenly regions, there is one thing I do seem to have acquired in full measure for the study of sacred philosophy, the exercise of virtue and the search for truth; that is, the fitting and joyful company of the best of men. For I hold the friendship of Giovanni Cavalcanti and Marsilio Ficino worthy of being numbered among those I have just mentioned. With God to guide us, who has so fortunately established and quickened this bond, our friendship will serve us well in our necessary tasks, in leading a tranquil life and in discovering the divine.[5]

[1] ms Persas Zoroaster in

52

Poeticus furor a Deo est

Poetic frenzy is from God

Marsilio Ficino to Antonio Pelotti and[1] Baccio Ugolini: greetings.

When my good friends, Antonio Calderini and Bindaccio da Ricasoli, and I were reading together what you each wrote in praise of Carlo Marsuppini, that child of the Muses, we agreed that Plato was right in his view that poetry springs not from technique but from a kind of frenzy. Although it is not necessary to give reasons where the matter is self-evident, I shall nevertheless mention the reasons Plato gives. In *Phaedrus* and *Ion*, he discusses divine frenzy,[1] of which he claims there are three principal signs.

Firstly, without God, one man can scarcely master a single art, even after a long time; but the true poets, such as he holds Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod and Pindar to have been, included in their poems[2] signs and evidence of every art. Secondly, those who are in a frenzy utter many wonderful things, which a little later, when their frenzy has abated, they themselves do not really understand, as if they had not spoken them, but God had sounded through them, as though through trumpets. Thirdly, neither prudent men nor those learned from their youth have proved to be the best poets. Indeed, some were out of their minds, as Homer and Lucretius were known to have been, or unlettered, as Hesiod testifies of himself, and as Plato describes Ion and Tynnicus of Calchis. Passing beyond the limitations of skill, these men suddenly produced astonishing poetry.

Plato adds that some very unskilled men are thus possessed by the Muses, because divine providence wants to show mankind that the great poems are not the invention of men but gifts from Heaven. He indicates this in *Phaedrus* when he says that no one, however diligent and learned in all the arts, has ever excelled in poetry unless to these other qualities has been added a fiery quickening of the soul. We experience this when we are

[1] ms Pellocto et Baccio

[2] ms suis poematibus certa

inflamed by God's presence working in us. Such force carries the seed of the divine mind.[2]

Farewell.

4th March, 1474.

53

Cura patriae, familiae, amicorum

Care for country, family and friends

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco Tedaldi: greetings.

YOUR father's brother, Bartolo Tedaldi, a learned and prudent man, often used to quote those words of Socrates: 'In the affairs of men, two things above all call for care—one's native land and one's family.'[1] And rightly so, for as a man fathers his child, so does the country a family.[a]

Why then, do you travel abroad so often, my Francesco, and for so long? In this way you do not serve your country, nor adequately look after your family. Think less about leaving your sons good things than giving them good company. You may perhaps find good things abroad but you can be sure of good company at home. I know you trust in the diligence and integrity of your son, Lattanzio; I myself do not lack trust in him. But what about your friends? If you would heed yourself, you should sometimes heed your friends; heed your friends, or rather yourself, today. Heed your enemies tomorrow, if you have any; but, I pray, at least attend to me, to whom you are as dear as the dearest.

Farewell.

5th March, 1474.

[a] Cuius enim patriae membrum est familia, corpus patris

54

Quis sit verus vir appellandus

Who ought to be called a true man

Marsilio Ficino to Bartolomeo della Fonte and Alessandro Braccesi,[1] pupils of the Muses: greetings.

If you wonder why I give Niccolo Michelozzi the special title of true man, I reply it is because in him I find nothing effeminate, nothing brutish[2] and nothing deceitful. Both outwardly and within himself he reveals nothing that[3] is not virtuous. Why do you think that no one anywhere disparages Niccolo, even slightly? Why is he praised without exception? Because he is loved without affectation. And why is that? Because he loves without affectation, and lives without deceit.

Farewell. But take care Niccolo does not read this letter. I am determined to praise him while he is away, lest I should seem to praise a true man less than truly. Greet our Piero Cennini, who is so outstanding both in piety and learning.

6th April, 1474.

[1] ms Alexandro Braccio Musarum
[2] ms nihil efferatum nihil
[3] ms nihil quod non

55

De humanitate

On humanity

Marsilio Ficino to Tommaso Minerbetti, a humane man: greetings.

Why are boys more cruel than old men, madmen more cruel than the sane, stupid men more than the clever? Because the former are, so to speak,

less human than the others. Hence those who are more cruel[1] are called inhuman and brutish. For those who fall far short of the full nature of Man, through lack of years, mental defect, physical disease or an unfavourable position of the stars, mostly hate or ignore the human race, as if it were something alien and unconnected to them. Nero was not a man, I would say, but a monster in a man's skin. For if he had really been a man, he would have loved all other men as members of the same body.

Individual men, formed by one idea in the same image, are one man. It is for this reason, I think, that of all the virtues, wise men named only one after man himself: that is humanity, which loves and cares for all men as though they were brothers, born in a long succession of one father.

Therefore, most humane man, persevere in the service of humanity. Nothing is dearer to God than love. There is no surer sign of madness or of future misery than cruelty.

Remain a friend to Carlo Valguli of Brescia; for he is a man of outstanding humanity, as well as excelling in the humanities through his studies of Greek and Latin.[2]

[1] ms qui crudeliores sunt

[2] ms Crudelitas. Persevera etiam in familiaritate Caroli Valguli Brixiensis. Est enim vir humanitate humanitatisque studiis tam graecis quam latinis excellens

56

Gratia, amor, fides, amicitia

Grace, love, faith, friendship

Marsilio Ficino to Naldo Naldi, poet: greetings.

I WANTED just now to call you the delight of Phoebus, and to honour your poetry, as is just, with abundant praise, but it came to mind that it is quite unfitting to praise the Muse except by the Muse, or to praise poetry except by poems. However, I cannot be entirely silent about your works, O Love and Faith, for something rouses me to speech; therefore I will

praise you. Grace moves Love, Love begets Faith. Faith embraces her father Love, and through the heat of this embrace, by Love gives birth to Friendship. Then Faith feeds this infant Friendship, allowing her to grow daily, and completely protecting her from destruction.

Why do we think this happens? Because when other things grow older they become weaker, but Friendship as it grows older grows stronger. Is it fostered by the frequent exchange of many favours? No, certainly not. For since the will is free, Friendship is obtained by free will and not at a price. Faith, made firm by time, confirms Friendship, and by Faith alone Goodwill becomes at the same time most ancient and most strong.

It is Faith above all else I delight in praising. For the learning of anyone belongs to one only, but Faith belongs to at least two; for what[1] you know, you know for yourself, but you are faithful both to yourself and to me.

Farewell, my Naldo, more faithful than faith and oldest friend of all. Continue to be in the company of that learned and upright man, Bernardo Rucellai. Remember, whenever we used to seek an example of a just citizen or a happy man, from a hundred thousand men, with my full agreement, you would put Rucellai first.

Once more farewell.

8th April, 1474.

[1] ms duorum, quid enim

57

Stultitia et miseria hominum

The folly and misery of men

Marsilio Ficino to Riccardo Angiolieri of Anghiari, Oliviero Arduini and Antonio Serafico, his fellow philosophers: greetings.

WHAT did Democritus[1] laugh at so much? What made Heraclitus[2] weep? The former, I believe, laughed at the folly of men, and the latter

wept at their misery. Folly appears to be ridiculous, and misery lamentable. What is folly, but a corruption of judgement? What is misery, but the torment of desire springing from corrupt judgement?

Who will deny that those men are foolish who attend to other people's affairs, but neglect their own? They esteem highly what is absent and what is new, and belittle what is present and familiar. Because of their ceaseless longing for what is to come, they do not enjoy what is present. Although movement has to be stilled for there to be rest; yet those men are forever beginning new and different movements, in order that they may one day come to rest. They accumulate wealth as though they would never die. They misuse pleasures as though they would die each day. Let us have done with further examples for the present, for an endless number occur to us.

I can only judge it[1] the most foolish act of all, that many people most diligently feed a beast, that is their body, a wild, cruel and dangerous animal; but allow themselves, that is, the soul, in so far as they have one, to starve to death. We are surprised that while we continue to live, or rather die like this, we are unhappy, as though we could reap a different harvest from the one we have sown. Misery is the fruit of foolishness. How is this? Because we foolishly over-feed the body and neglect the soul, the body becomes fat and robust and the soul thin and puny. So it comes about that the soul, in its meagre and feeble state, sees physical things as both large and strong. The soul greatly desires what looks large, but fears what looks strong even more. For this reason, in its misery, it is harassed partly by the passion of greed and partly by the dread of fear.

Let us, I beg you, nourish and increase the spirit with spiritual food, so that it may at length become mighty and have small regard for physical things, as though they were worth very little. Then may no part of the spirit shift from its own seat through the assaults of the flesh.

Let us climb into the high watch tower of the mind, leaving the dust of the body below; then we will gaze more closely at the divine and view the mortal from a distance. The former will seem greater than usual, and the latter smaller. So, cherishing the divine, and disregarding the mortal, we will no longer be foolish or miserable, but indeed wise and happy.

Farewell.

[1] ms occurrit. Illud in

58

Stultitia et miseria hominum

The folly and misery of men

Marsilio Ficino to Piero Vanni, Cherubino Quarquagli, Domenico Galletti: greetings.

You have seen painted in my academy a sphere of the world; on one side Democritus laughing, and on the other Heraclitus weeping.[1] Why is Democritus laughing? Why does Heraclitus weep? Because the mass of mankind is a monstrous, mad and miserable animal.

Mortal men ask God for good things every day, but they never pray that they may make good use of them. They want fortune to wait upon their desires, but they are not concerned that desire should wait upon reason. They would like all their household furniture down to the least article to be made as beautiful as possible, but they are hardly ever concerned that the soul should become beautiful. They diligently seek out remedies for bodily diseases, but neglect the diseases of the soul. They think they can be at peace with others, yet they continually wage war with themselves. For there is a constant battle between body and soul, between the senses and reason. They believe that they can find themselves a faithful friend in others, but not one of them keeps faith with himself. What they have praised, they reject; what they have desired, they do not want; and contrariwise. They lay out the parts of buildings to a measure, and tune strings on a lyre to a hair's breadth, but they never attempt to harmonize the parts and movements of the soul. They make stones into the likeness of living men, and they make living men into stones; they despise wise men themselves, but they honour the statues and names of the wise. They claim to know about everyone else's affairs, although they do not know about their own.

What more, my friends? The magistrates forbid murder, and allow instruments for killing men to be made everywhere. They desire an excellent crop of men, yet they do not take sufficient care of the seedling, that is the child.

People always live badly today; they only live well tomorrow. For the sake of ambition they strive against each other with evil deeds, but the path to glory would be easier to tread by doing good to one another.

Although they always speak evil, they hope to be well spoken of themselves; although they do evil, they hope to receive good. We proclaim that we are the authors of good, but that God is the author of evil. We blame our faults on the stars.

How many people will you find who value a man as much as money; who cultivate themselves in the same way as they cultivate their fields and other affairs; who bring up their family with as much care as many rear their horses, dogs and birds; who consider how grave is the waste of time? In spending money we are very mean, in expending time we are extravagant beyond measure. How many can you name who recognise the poverty of their soul? Everyone believes that he abounds in wisdom, but is short of money.

What a sorry state! We seek the greatest in the least, the high in the low, good in evil, rest in activity, peace in dissension, plenty in penury; in short, life in death.

I beg you, my friends, let us seek the same ends that we are already seeking, but let us not continue to seek them in the same place. The man who believes he will find one thing in its opposite is mad and miserable.

Farewell.

59

Stultitia miseriaque hominum

The folly and misery of men

Marsilio Ficino to Cristoforo Landino, matchless in learning and virtue: greetings.

ARISTOTLE raised questions about the nature of things. I am now going to pose you questions about the nature of Man. Come tell me, why do men boast of their reason yet live at the mercy of chance? They desire or fear

any number of things before they really know whether such things should be either desired or feared, and they put the momentary and trivial before the eternal and immeasurable. Why will they pay no heed to man, nor be subject to the wise, yet give themselves up most willingly to the service of brutes and of wickedness?

Why is it that we strive to be masters of others, when we are not masters of ourselves? Why in our zeal for mastery do we fall daily into slavery? And why do we strive to gain honours, instead of to be worthy of them? Again, seeing that animals without human protection cannot properly be controlled by an animal,[1] what makes us think that men can happily be ruled by a man without God's counsel and assistance? And how in the midst of such bounteous plenty do we come to be querulous and needy? What makes us envy so many people, when the plight of mortals rather merits pity than envy? Why do we so easily overlook goodness, but evil never? And since qualities are cancelled by their opposites, why do we try to cure evils with evils? Why do we often hope to gain honour through infamy?[2] We admire virtue in another, but we ourselves strive rather to seem worthy of admiration than to *be* worthy of it. We are upset by faults in others, but we hardly ever consider how we can avoid upsetting both ourselves and them. We close our ears to truth, but to lies they are open wide. And what shall I say of those made captive by their love for some person or some object, who despise and abandon their own selves to pursue something else? Oh fools! Oh wretches! Since you cannot lay hold of anything by any means but through your own selves, how will you ever come by outer possessions if you have lost the inner? Travellers! Why do you seek treasure far away, when it is nearby, indeed within yourselves?

I am often given to wonder, too, Landino, at the reason why we fear merely that one death, which is clearly the end of dying, but never at all our daily deaths. Undoubtedly at every moment the constitution of the body is changed, and the past life comes to an end. Finally, as it seems to me, seeing that we practise the virtues falsely but the vices faithfully, it is no wonder that to the best of our ability we end up falsely happy, and sincerely miserable. This Democritus ridiculed, Heraclitus bewailed, Socrates sought to cure, and God can cure. Oh what a miserable creature is man, except he sometime rise up above the man, I mean commit himself

[1] ms bestias a bestia
[2] ms gloriam per infamiam pervenire

to God, and love God for the sake of God and everything else for His sake. That is the sole answer to these problems and the end of all ills.

Farewell.

60

Exhortatio ad modestiam et studia literarum

An encouragement to modesty and the study of literature

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Giuliano de' Medici: greetings.

Even if my love for you is such that I cannot be a perfect judge in your affairs, or rather mine, yet Giuliano, since you ask, I shall say what I think. First then, I praise your prudence, because you do not trust your own ability, but consult an older man. For you know how high an opinion everyone holds of himself, through his own self love. Then I praise a natural sweetness in your letter; with only a pen you seem to me to have expressed, like some painters can, the beauty of your eyes and the charm of your mouth, just as you always do with your look and your tongue.

So press on, Giuliano, sweetest of all. Press on, I beseech you. Cultivate the Tusculan gardens[1] lovingly, as you have already begun. For if you practise licking the Tullian flowers for a year, you will one day strike the divine honey.[1] If I may commend your own to you, may I especially commend Andrea Cambini.

Farewell.

[1] ms lambes nectareum mel

61

Quod amicus est in amico

That a friend is within a friend

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Giuliano[1] de' Medici: greetings.

Tell me, now I beg you, Giuliano, if someone should watch carefully over your affairs while you slept, would you be angry with him because he was not rude enough to wake you? Would you not rather be in his debt? Certainly you would, and in no small measure. And so you are in mine.[2] While you were resting, I was here considering and protecting important interests of yours.

But why, you say, did you not summon me, since you could have done so? Even if I had thought you absent, I would not have summoned you, lest I should cause you trouble. But in truth my great love for you has long impressed your[3] image on my soul. And just as I sometimes see myself outside myself in a mirror, so very often I see you within me in my heart. Besides, your brother, Lorenzo, your other self, both in nature and will, was then here. And so since I clearly saw this Giuliano of mine both within and[4] outside me, I could not think him absent. It was therefore not from negligence, but an excess of love that I neither called you then to attend to your affairs, nor afterwards rendered an account of what had been done.

Another time would you like to be called, dearest Giuliano? Then you must take care to be loved less. That would indeed be hard, perhaps impossible, for you would first have to take care you were not Giuliano. You will only reject love when you reject yourself. So what shall I do in future? Shall I call you another time? By no means, I think. For long enough has Love called both of us to each other, and to himself.

Farewell.

[1] ms Ficinus Juliano Medici
[2] ms parum. Debebis et
[3] ms figuram tuam animo
[4] ms intus et extra

62

Salus amici ab amico

The health of a friend depends on his friend

Carlo Marsuppini to Marsilio Ficino, the Platonist: greetings.

BLESSINGS upon you, sole source of my health. For I am healthy in mind and body, just as long as I am with you. And I seem to be alive only when I live with you. Whenever I am absent from you I waste away. So, my Marsilio, see that you do not destroy a man, or rather kill a friend, by deserting me. You are always running hither and thither. At one moment, on a lower level, you are looking after bodies; at another, on a higher, you are caring for souls. Meanwhile I die a thousand deaths. If you have such great charity, as surely you have, why, pray, do you not care for your dear Carlo by remaining here? For my soul fails at your departure, and my body is sick. Oh that you would return, sole source of my health! It is now four days since you left; when these four have doubled, abide by your promise.

Farewell.

63

Divinatio de amico

A prophecy concerning a friend

Marsilio Ficino to Carlo Marsuppini: greetings.

MAY you also be thrice and four times blessed. While asleep at dawn today, I seemed to be reading a very short passage, in which the arrangement of the words and sentences was such as I have always tried to follow. Thus I was in doubt whether the words I read were mine or another's.

A little later, on rising from my bed, your letter was handed to me, from which I suddenly recognised in actual experience what I had discussed in my book on the *Immortality of Souls*:[1] that often morning sleep contains something prophetic.

Marsuppini, I saw today a more beautiful Marsilio in your eyes than this Marsilio. But let us now leave these things. In short, such is your letter that it compels me to answer with my feet rather than my hands, and by voice rather than letter.[1] Give my greetings to the priest Taddeo Ugolini.

Farewell.

1st March, 1473.
Pomino.

[1] ms respondere, Vale i Martii MCCCCLXXIII. Pomini. Saluta

64

Quantum possit desiderium amicorum

How great the longing of friends can be

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

THEOLOGIANS measure stillness[1] by eternity; natural philosophers measure movement by time; lovers measure time by emotions. For the greater their longing, the shorter, it seems to them, is the time of possession, and the longer the time of waiting. Thus how much you love me, you have declared most clearly in your letter, for you called the silence of one day a long silence and you said that you waited long for my letter which flew to you with great speed.

How much I[2] in turn love you, is clear from this: having read it already ten times, your letter appears to me so brief that in almost the same moment it greets me and says farewell. There is this difference in love. When

[1] ms theologi statum metiuntur
[2] ms quantum ego te

others are bid farewell, they are thought to be well wished; when lovers hear farewell, they hear ill tidings. So you make me glad when you greet me, and at the same time sad when you bid farewell. However, you say both at the same time, it seems to me.

Certainly I might write more, and possibly better. But distracted by these conflicting emotions, of which you are the cause, I can at present write neither more nor better. And so to you also—at once hail and farewell.

21st March, 1473.
Florence.

65

Laudare praestat benevolentiam, quam ingenium

It is better to praise benevolence than genius

Marsilio Ficino to Angelo Poliziano, the Homeric Poet: greetings.

I HAD taken up my pen, Angelo, intending with all my powers to extol to the heavens your Homeric Muse. But suddenly Cupid interposed.

'What are you about, foolish Ficino? Will you always be busy praising a muse? If you wish to give praise without suspicion of flattery, then praise me, philosopher! For in honouring the Muse of Poliziano, you honour Angelo alone; but if you honour Cupid you are honouring Angelo and Marsilio at the same time. For I am the love you have in common; I cherish both and am cherished by each of you.'

Thus spoke the god to me, Angelo. But I replied:

'The Muse of Poliziano is truthful, and she has never compelled me to lie.[1] But you, deceitful Love, force me to lie every day. Yesterday I was so in love with the delights of Poliziano, that I swore my love could not be more fervent. Today I am again so in love,[2] that I swear yesterday my love

[1] ms nunquam mentiri me
[2] ms rursus amo, ut

was inadequate, and at the same time that it cannot possibly be more ardent tomorrow than it is today. Every day I am thus fooled by the next. Who would credit that my love is always full-grown, yet ever-growing? But let it grow as it pleases, so long as it does not grow feeble.

'But listen, Cupid, it is not Venus who is the mother of this[3] love. It is the Muse Calliope[1] who carefully nourishes it, so that it grows continuously. Let it grow with this nourishment, and let it be deceitful.[2] For this is no crime where love is concerned.'

So, Angelo, it is my duty and my wish to cherish our mutual love and your Muse together. You yourself should worship that Muse as the mother of love and of praise.

21st March, 1473.

[3] ms amoris huius mater

66

Quos amor fallat, quos non fallat

Whom love deceives, whom it does not deceive

Marsilio Ficino to Niccolo Michelozzi, a true man: greetings.

TODAY, Michelozzi, I wrote letters of love to Lorenzo de' Medici and to Angelo Poliziano, I know not in what manner, so that it would not be remarkable if they seemed quite foolish; for love is foolish. Do you want me to be foolish a third time? Yes, both of us want this, but it must be brief. Niccolo, I consider nothing more important than the fact that I love, and nothing better than the fact that I am loved, and by men most worthy of love. Sometimes I may perhaps speak less than the truth because of love, but about love I can speak nothing but the truth.

However, love does not deceive me where I have made a judgment before I have loved. Love blinds the judgment which follows it, but not that which precedes it. Sometimes love sees nothing; sometimes it sees too

much. To what purpose is all this? You well know. For, as the most loving man of all, you are well practised in matters of love.

Commend my Giovanni Cavalcanti and myself to Lorenzo de' Medici. And look after his health very carefully, for it is the life of the state.

Farewell.

21st March, 1473.[1]
Florence.

[1] ms Martii 1473. Florentiae.

67

Commendatio ab egestate et dignitate

A commendation from need and merit

Marsilio Ficino to Matteo Palmieri, the theological poet:[1] greetings.

ALTHOUGH I know for certain that learned men need not be recommended to Palmieri, himself a palm among the Muses, nevertheless in order to fulfil the offices of friendship I commend highly to you my former teacher, Luca of San Gimignano,[1] who together with Comandi taught me Grammar, and to whom I owe the ability to speak eloquently instead of vainly.

You should take care of him for two reasons: first, because he is in need, and second because he deserves it. Doing good to the needy is an act of mercy, but to the deserving,[2] justice; and I know you to be both merciful and just.

Farewell.

[1] ms Palmerio Poetae Theologico.
[2] ms officium est merenti

68

Cum bene omnia regantur a Deo, omnia in melius accipienda

Since all things are well governed by God, all things should be accepted for the best

Marsilio Ficino to Bishop Campano, the poet: greetings.

Tell me, Campano, do you ever laugh at the arrogance of mortals? I often do.[1] I ridicule it in the hope that I may avoid it. Boys cannot understand the counsel of their elders, nor peasants the thoughts of the wise. However, with unbecoming arrogance, the earthly[2] creature Man often presumes to fathom the reasons of divine nature, and to search into the purpose of its providence. And, what is worse, men of all ages blasphemously discuss the divine mysteries at banquets, and even in brothels. Pythagoras justly prohibited speaking of these mysteries without divine insight.[1] No man, but the divine, Campano, perceives the divine. For Paul, the Apostle, rightly said: 'The things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God.'[2] Again, no man speaks more falsely about divine matters than he who measures them to a hair's breadth. In Isaiah,[3] God speaks thus: 'He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.' And again 'The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.'[4][3]

It should therefore be enough for man to know that the beautiful working of this single universe is governed by the wise architect, on whom it depends. From goodness itself only good can spring. And what proceeds from that can only be ordered well. Therefore, everything should be accepted for the best. Who thus understands the divine, and loves it, is divine by nature, good in practice, joyful in hope, blessed in reward.

Farewell, O blessed man.

[1] ms saepe derideo, et
[2] ms tamen terrenum animal
[3] ms cogitationes quo vanas

69

De stultitia hominum, et quae sit vera scientia

On the stupidity of men, and what true knowledge is

Marsilio Ficino to Panezio Pandozzi: greetings.

TODAY our Angelo Poliziano recommended[1] Panezio to Marsilian, or rather Platonic, discipline. It is my custom to write comedy to new friends, and satire to old ones, but today[2] in Panezio's case I shall write satire, for I wish our friendship to be made perfect as soon as it begins.

Consider, Panezio, how perversely we live.[3] Being of ill report, we do not easily listen; yet, impure as we are, we hope to be heard by God.[4] Alas, how insanely and unrighteously we live! We try to change God and not our habits. We wish to convince others of the good, but we do not convince[5] ourselves. We carry good in our mouth but evil in our heart. When speaking of virtue, like the lyre we do not hear[6] our true sound. We resemble bad doctors who do not manifest in themselves[7] the health which they promise to others. My friend, I would like you to listen to me for a little while. For no fee I will in a few words teach you Oratory, Music and Geometry. Persuade yourself of what is right; regulate the movements of the mind;[a] measure your energy and actions. You will say that this is too difficult. But it would not be very difficult, Panezio, if you desired to live well as earnestly as you desire to live.

[1] ms hodie commendauit. Ego
[2] ms satyram hodie canam
[3] ms perverse vivamus. Nam
[4] ms Deo dum improbi vivimus
[5] ms nobis ipsi persuademus.
[6] ms non audimus. Malos
[7] ms pollicentur, ipsi sibi
[a] animi

70

Liberalitatis laus, eleemosinae laus

Praise of generosity, praise of almsgiving

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

I SHALL say what I feel, my dear Lorenzo, even if it may seem blasphemous; but in reality what is true is not blasphemous, for there is nothing more sacred than truth. So I shall say what I feel, freely.

God, Lorenzo, God Himself is for sale. But with what coin can He be bought? At the price that He Himself pays for others: that is generous charity to the poor. God in His great love freely gives all things to all men, yet He gives to the poor alone, for every man, however rich he may seem, is quite destitute in relation to God.

Deservedly, we can buy God only by the practice of this virtue, for in this way alone do we act most truly like Him. No-one wise, strong or temperate would boast[1] that he emulates God. These virtues are shadows, not copies[2] of divine virtues: only he who gives generously to the poor acts like God exactly, for the principle[3] in giving is the same both for the generous[4] man and for God. Fortunate indeed is the merchant who for such a paltry sum redeems[5] himself from his enemies,[6] that is his imperfections, and at the same time buys men and God. He who is rich of both men and God will never be poor. He, who in the midst of great riches often reflects on what it is to be poor, will never become poor, for from the summit he looks upon poverty with compassion. A man of small stature can do nothing better than ascend the heights with humility. A great man can do nothing better than descend to the lowest places with magnanimity. The other virtues for the most part benefit only the man using them; generosity benefits both him and others, and as its application is wider than the other virtues, so it is considered more excellent. The more far reaching a good act is, the more is it God-like. If evil-doing is the worst

[1] ms se iactet aemulari Deum.
[2] ms virtutum non imagines. Solus
[3] ms dando ratio est
[4] ms est liberalis hominis
[5] ms vitiis, redimit simulque
[6] ms se ab hostibus

of acts, being contrary to the nature of good and against human society, then we must consider doing good to be the best. The other virtues can[7] sometimes arouse jealousy; this one alone always kindles love and completely extinguishes hatred and jealousy. This virtue works most fully when it succours man; both the needy because of his misfortune and the deserving because of his merit.

Therefore sow, my dear Lorenzo, sow I say, fortunate farmer, as you have long ago begun, this arid field of humankind with good will, and it will at length not only abound with fruit and vines,[8] but also flow with milk and honey. But although it is said that the word human is derived from humus,[1] the principle[9] of sowing amongst humankind is different from sowing in the earth. The man who sows on poor soil wastes the seed, but he who sows amongst poor men assuredly works to good purpose, for he shall harvest an hundredfold as was promised by Him who does not lie, and—more priceless yet—from a hundred seeds, he shall harvest the one God.

But why all this? When I heard that during this[10] Holy Week you had compassionately distributed to the poor as much, and, indeed, more than you generally do, I did not wish to be miserly in praising your charity, which you have exercised generously and, if I may say so, lavishly.

12th April, 1474.
Florence.

[7] ms nonnumquam possunt. Sola
[8] ms frugibus uvisque solum
[9] ms inserendo ratio est
[10] ms te iis sacris

71

Nulla virtus benignitate amabilior

No virtue is more lovable than kindness

Marsilio Ficino to Niccolo Michelozzi, a true man: greetings.

If it be womanly to weep,[1] Michelozzi, I confess I am the most womanly of men. Thalia[1] gave me this sensitive nature, but our Lorenzo has made

[1] ms Si lachrymare mulierum

it more sensitive still. For I weep with a tender joy, or I know not what strange emotion, when I consider, as I often do, how dutiful is our Lorenzo towards God, how great is his compassion to the poor, and his kindness to all men.

But the kinder he is to others, the less kind[2] is he to his Marsilio; for every day by his kindness, or rather his unkindness, he strangely bewitches and ensnares this unhappy man. And as he removes the tears of others, so he moves me to tears. When I love him most ardently, it is then he goes furthest away. Most loving of men, remind Lorenzo to love those things he once loved, and, as soon as possible, to come as near in presence as he has come near in love.

12th April, 1474.[3]

[2] ms est, tanto magis

[3] ms xii Aprilis mccccIxxiv.

72

Verus amicus non eget absentia, ut magis desideretur

A true friend does not need to be absent to be more desired

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Giuliano de' Medici: greetings.

That moral discourse you gave some time ago at an evening gathering brought your friends to tears and repentance for their sins; some cried out, whilst others struck their chests with their hands. It is said that Antonio, the Tuscan poet, went pale and fell, as if struck dead. Shortly afterwards you suddenly made away to the mountains of Mugello;[1] so that just as you had almost made Antonio perish by your presence, now you would despatch your Marsilio by your absence. How undutiful you are! Once you took pity on your cruellest enemies; now you do not even spare your friends.

But perhaps you decided to spend a few days in the country, so that you

would seem more desirable on your return, and more courteous after your rustication. For you know that appetite springs from hunger, and admiration from novelty. But neither you nor I need this medicine, you cunning Medici, for what can seem more courteous than courtesy itself, or more to be desired than desire?[1]

I pray you get rid of these medicines; they are very irritating for the patient, and quite unnecessary for the doctor.[2] My friend, there are those who may be greatly missed in their absence, but are daily less desirable when present. But the salty[3] potion of your presence does not quench my thirst but every day inflames it. At least while you spend your time with our Angelo, Giuliano, enfold Marsilio with your words, caress him with your tongue, Giuliano; or else bite him. I would rather be devoured by Giuliano, than rejected.

Your Benedetto of Pistoia sends you a thousand greetings.[4]

Farewell.

[1] ms desideratius desiderio. Mitte
[2] ms et medico non
[3] ms quotidie salso liquore
[4] ms Benedictus Pistoriensis tuus totus totum tibi milies se commendat.

73

Quis dives iniustus sit, quis iustus

The rich man who is unjust, and the one who is just

Marsilio Ficino to Angelo Poliziano, the Homeric Poet: greetings.

God ordained all the waters of the world to be in common for creatures of the water, and all the earth for creatures of the earth. Only[1] that unhappy being, man, divided what[2] God had united.

He confined his dominion, which was vast by nature, to narrow limits. He introduced into the world 'mine' and 'yours', the origin of all strife

[1] ms communem. Solus homo
[2] ms animal quae Deus

and evil. Thus it was to good purpose that Pythagoras[1] directed that everything should be held in common among friends, and that Plato[2] directed the same among citizens. Therefore, those who are rich should be regarded as most unjust if, because of their pride, they forget God, the bountiful giver of all riches. They make themselves masters over the poor, and call themselves possessors of wealth, when it is they who are possessed by their wealth. On the other hand, they are just and happy men who, endowed with great riches, regard themselves as servants of God, protecting the poor and distributing their wealth.

What a fortunate young man you are, to have recently found such men as patrons! I, too, have had such men as patrons for a long time. You will be surprised, Angelo, when I say that Giuliano's absence[3] makes me very unhappy, for now that he has departed, if it were not for Matteo Franco seasoning my dullness with his wit, I should either lose the taste for my own company, or hasten to approach the sweet flowers and scents of Giuliano de' Medici. In any event, Poliziano, I shall only with difficulty be able to confine myself here for three days.

[3] ms propter absentiam Juliani

74

Iurisconsulti bonitas et dignitas

The goodness and dignity of the lawyer

Marsilio Ficino to Angelo Niccolini, son of the distinguished lawyer Ottone, and the distinguished heir to the art of his father: greetings.

A PAINTER who makes corrupt use of his art is[1] not necessarily a bad painter because of this, but he is a bad man. Thus a good painter is not the same as a good man. This is evident, for there is a great deal of difference

[1] ms pictor est, sed

between goodness and painting. And the same[2] applies to the rest of the arts. But a lawyer who makes unlawful use of the law, is both a bad lawyer and a bad man; while the upright lawyer is also an upright man and citizen. The relationship between the profession of civil law and the virtue of man is as close as this.

He who defaces a coin, a thing of very little value, dug from the bowels of the earth, is punished by human law, as you know, with the severest penalty. Thus how sternly is the man punished by divine law who corrupts the most precious law itself, which has been sent to us from heaven!

So I charge you, my Angelo, use the law lawfully. Persist in this, I beseech you. With a noble heart spurn threats and bribes; Almighty God, who is the maker and master of law, and who is also its aim and reward, will not desert you. Persevere, my friend; be sure you will store up incorruptible riches with God. High also is the office of lawyer among men. He is the defender of the citizens as a whole, the general oracle of the state, and the interpreter of the divine mind and will.

Farewell. Greet your, or rather our, Renato Pazzi, a just and learned citizen.[3]

[2] ms eodem modo pacto

[3] ms Vale. Saluta Renatum pactium tuum immo nostrum, civem iustum atque doctum.

75

Dignitas sacerdotis

The dignity of the priest

Marsilio Ficino to the Priest Pace, Professor of Canonical Law: greetings.

Riccardo Angiolieri, the distinguished theologian, and I often discussed together the dignity of the priest. We concluded at last that, just as after God nothing is more virtuous than a good angel, and nothing more pernicious than an evil one, so nothing on earth is fairer than an honourable priest, and nothing more disgraceful than a base one. The former is the

salvation of religion and mankind, the latter their destruction. What is a real priest, but a soul dedicated to God?[1] An angel of God standing in God's place, performing His work amongst men; His living temple. One who has rightly considered the dignity of the priesthood will not abuse it. Let us, therefore, consider what it is to be a real priest. It is surely almost to be God. A priest is a kind of temporal God, but God is priest eternal.

[1] ms nisi Deo dicatus

76

Non cuilibet dandi sunt sacri ordines

Holy orders are not to be given to anyone

Marsilio Ficino to Bishop Mariano of Cortona: greetings.

Our Sebastiano Salvini, my nephew, came to you desiring to enter the third of the holy orders[1] and will, I think, be accepted. As you do not know the man, but do know that what is holy[1] should not be given to the dogs, you will perhaps say: 'Marsilio, the man who is to hold so great an office should be learned, dutiful to God and just towards men. Who will testify that this young man has these qualities, or who stands surety for him?' I reply first,[2] Reverend Father, in the words of Socrates, that like a vessel,[3] a man is known by his sound. Therefore, Socrates said to everybody who came to him and remained silent: 'Speak, stranger, so that I may see you', for he considered the soul alone to be the man.[2]

Moreover, if you were learned in the art of Zopyros,[3] I would perhaps add that you should take into consideration his natural characteristics. But the Master of Life forbids us to judge a man by his appearance. You ask who stands surety? You have Marsilio. You want someone of more

[1] ms scis sanctum canibus
[2] ms respondeo primum, venerande
[3] ms sicut vasa, ita

substance? The Bishop of Volterra stands surety. The young man was brought up by both of us.

77

Nulla consonantia magis delectat, quam cordis et linguae

No harmony gives greater delight than that of heart and tongue

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

The Florentine lawyer[1] Bastiano Foresi sends you his poem about *The Triumph of the Virtues over the Vices*; a work worthy of such a title. Read the poem, Lorenzo, and receive the poet; for in his soul, too, the virtues are triumphant over the vices. No discord is more offensive than that between heart and tongue, nor does any harmony give greater delight.

[1] ms foresius notarius florentinus poema

78

De officio civis

On the duty of a citizen

Marsilio Ficino to Piero del Nero: greetings.

Tell me, Piero, why did the fever suddenly strike[1] me after it had attacked your uncle Bernardo? Is it that, as we are so close to each other, when the dog-star belches its flames on one of us it also sets fire to the

[1] ms me accendit. An

other?[2] May your uncle quickly recover so that Marsilio may too, or rather so that Florence may enjoy better health. If she always had such medical men as she has in this Medici, she would never be seriously ill. Such men properly perform the function of a citizen, without which the good health of the country is not preserved.

It is the duty of a citizen to consider the state as a single being[1] formed of its citizens who are the parts; and that the parts should serve the whole, not the whole the parts. For when the profit of the part alone is sought, there is no profit at all for either part or whole. When, however, the good of the whole is sought, the good of both is assured. Therefore because of this connection the citizen ought to remember that nothing good or bad can touch one limb of the state, without affecting the others and indeed the state as a whole. And again, nothing can happen to the whole body of the state without soon affecting each limb.

Let no one, then, in this household of city say, 'This is mine', and 'That is yours', for everything in this vast organism[a] belongs in a way to everyone in common. Rather let him say, 'Both this and that are mine', not because they are his personal property, but because he loves and cares for them. Let each man love and reverence his country as he would the founder of his family. Let the ordinary citizen obey the ancient, well-tried laws, just as he would obey God, for such laws are not established without God. Let the magistrate remember that he is subject to the laws in just the same way as the ordinary citizen is subject to the magistrate. Let him understand that when he passes judgement he is himself being judged by God. Let him always have before him the injunction of Plato, to have regard not for himself, but the state; and not just some part of the state but the whole. In short, he should know[3] that Heaven's highest place is reserved for the man who has done his best to model his earthly country on the heavenly one. For nothing[4] pleases the universal ruler of the world more than the universal good.

I think that you know these and similar precepts relating to the true citizen, and I hope that you will abide by them since you lack neither instruction nor prudence. Besides, you have at home a competent teacher in this subject, about whose merits I will write another time.

Farewell. Our Giovanni Cavalcanti commends himself to you.

[2] ms evomere, quin accenderet
[3] ms respiciat. Sciat denique
[4] ms regi nihil gratius
[a] animali

79

Quid est bene vivere

What it is to live well

Marsilio Ficino to his Girolamo Pasqualini: greetings.

You ask what it is to live well. Nothing is more profitably sought. To live well, then, is to understand what is true; to take good counsel; to desire what is good; and to perform good acts. The first is a quality of wisdom; the second, of prudence; the third, of justice; and the fourth, of perseverance. The first comes from God; the second, from the first; the third, at once from God and man; and the fourth from the third. They live as men who live thus. They live as animals who live otherwise.

Farewell, and live as a man. Give my greetings to those pious men, Neri and Francesco Rinuccini.[1]

[1] ms Saluta Nerium et Franciscum Rinuccinos insignes pietate viros.

80

Vota non sunt spernenda

Prayers are not to be despised

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco Marescalchi of Ferrara, his distinguished fellow philosopher: greetings.

I have not yet finished the book about the Christian religion, Francesco, because during August, while I was still correcting it, I caught a fever and diarrhoea. Perhaps this year Saturn threatened me with this. At the time of my birth, it was in the ascending sign of Aquarius and was then in Cancer, my sixth house.

But now let us leave the heavenly bodies, for there are those who make light of such subjects, and let us come to something beyond the heavens. Listen to what has happened to me during this illness. There were times when I became so weak, Marescalchi, that I almost despaired of recovery. I then turned over in my mind those great works I have read during the last thirty years, to see if anything occurred to me that could ease a sick heart. Except for the Platonic authors, the writings of men did not help at all, but the works of Christ brought much more comfort than the words of philosophers. What is more, I offered prayers to the divine Mary and begged for some sign of recovery. I felt some relief immediately, and in dreams received a clear indication of recovery. So I do not owe a cock to Aesculapius,[1] but my heart and body to Christ and His mother. One must always accept everything as leading to the good, Marescalchi. Could it be that God wished to warn me by a sign during this illness that I must in future declare the Christian teaching with greater zeal and depth?[a] A few days later, with a similar prayer, I was freed of the heat of my urine.

Listen, if you will, to another thing that is wonderful and true. My father, Ficino, who was a surgeon in Florence and outstanding amongst his contemporaries, was once called by a countryman named Pasquino to heal his son Tommaso whose head had been most gravely wounded. After the doctor had examined the incurable wound he felt sure that the boy would soon be dead and left without expecting to return. The parents of the sick child whom the doctor had abandoned offered prayers to the divine Mary to heal their son. Now, at the very time that they were praying Ficino was in a light sleep resting under an oak tree on his journey when there appeared to him a woman whose countenance was worthy of reverence, and she rebuked him thus:

'Why are you ungrateful towards God, Ficino? You do not give freely what you have freely received from Him.' He replied, 'I give bread daily to those in need.' She rejoined: 'Give generously also to those who need the gifts of your art.'

Three days later, the countryman came to the doctor again asking him to come back and treat his son. Ficino was utterly astonished as he had been convinced the boy would be dead. He returned, without charge, mindful of his recent dream and the prayers of the parents, for the countryman had related what prayers he had offered and at what hour. Eventually the boy, who had been beyond the hope of the doctor and the art of healing, fully recovered. From that time on, Ficino frequently offered

[a] ingenio studioque

prayers to Mary, with fortunate results for the health of those entrusted to his care. So warn your friends not to despise prayers, for even Aristotle did not scorn them during the illness of his son-in-law.[2]

6th September, 1474.

81

Nobilitas, utilitas et usus medicinae

The nobility, usefulness and practice of medicine

Marsilio Ficino to Tommaso Valeri, an outstanding physician: greetings.

I HAVE read in Homer that one man of medicine is worth a host of other men,[1] and justly so; for the sacred writings of the Hebrews teach that the power of healing is the gift of God, rather than an invention of men. Let us honour the man of medicine because the Almighty created him of necessity. Furthermore, the Gentiles regard the masters of this art as gods. They bestowed divine honours upon Isis,[1] Apollo and Aesculapius,[2] and also upon outstanding doctors. For they dedicated temples to Chiron, Machaon, Podalirius, Hippocrates and Hermagoras. Hippocrates confirms this in his letter to the Abderites,[3] when he says that medicine is a gift of the gods, that it is free and that he has never accepted a reward for practising it. Also in a letter to Philemon[4] he says that medicine is related to prophecy, because our ancestor Apollo is the father of both arts; he foretells future illness as well as curing those already ill. Hence Pythagoras,[5] Empedocles and Apollonius of Tyana are said to have cured diseases with chants rather than with herbs.

The Magi thought that the mind of the sick should first be cleansed with sacred teachings[a] and prayers before they attended to the body. For

[1] ms volunt. Isidem, Apollinem
[a] sacris rationibus

clearly such an art as this has been received and is practised through divine grace, because the soul is dependent on God, and the body on the soul. Do not the Hebrews consider that the Archangel Raphael practised this art? Quite apart from other doctors, Christ Himself used to cure all the sick and ailing who were brought to Him, as though He were the doctor of mankind, and He entrusted the power of healing to His disciples. So it is that kings have never scorned to study and practise this most noble art, such as Sapor and Ginges, Kings of the Medes, Sabid, King of the Arabs, Mithridates,[6] King of the Persians, Hermes, King of the Egyptians, and Mesues,[7] nephew of the King of Damascus. Some believe that Avicenna was the Prince of Cordova. Such famous philosophers as Democritus, Timaeus of Locris, Plato, Aristotle and countless others of note have written about this art.

This letter has said almost as much as a letter can about the nobility of medicine. We can see how useful it is, from the fact that the arts which are directed towards the good life seem to be of little benefit without its assistance. We cannot live well if we are not alive! In this short span of life, little can be achieved in any skill without good health; and we cannot easily attain great merit among men or with God unless we live a long and temperate life. The careful application of medicine gives every opportunity to lead such a life. But in the practice of this art there must be the utmost devotion to God, and charity towards men, as Luke the Evangelist and the divine physicians Cosmus and Damian[8] have taught us by their example. For God is the source of all good and so the true doctor is like a god amongst men. He restores them from death to life and so he is worshipped as God, even by kings and wise men when they are ill.

All agree that a doctor needs a keen mind, knowledge and experience. It is clear that his consideration needs to be profound and full of care. But, as Hippocrates[9] says to the Abderites, when a case has been properly considered, delay may be more harmful in this art than in any other. However, in Galen's words to Glaucon,[10] it is even more dangerous to anticipate and interfere with the course of nature. For he says that many lives are lost daily as a result of this error, that is to say, the presumption of doctors who either hinder or hasten nature. The man who does not rely solely on his own skill is less likely to fall into such an error. Hippocrates[11] writes to Democritus that even though he is now very old he has not yet reached the final aim of medicine. Galen also says that it was not until he was ninety that he finally grasped the nature of the pulse. Above all the doctor should remember that the creator of health is God, that nature is

God's instrument for establishing or[2] maintaining health, and that the doctor is the servant of both. So he does not provide the strength, but prepares the ground and removes obstacles for the master craftsman. If he rashly wants to change or check the physical condition he often does both badly, and impedes nature which would do both well.

But let us listen to our divine Plato, as he speaks with the authority of the Pythagoreans on this subject in the *Timaeus*.[12] In truth the best of all movements is that which arises naturally by itself, as it is most akin to the motion of the mind and of the universe. Movement caused by an outside agency is of a lower order, but the lowest movement of all is when parts of the body are moved by outside agencies, while the body as a whole is at rest. So, of all the ways of cleansing and regulating the body, exercise is the most healthy. Next is the gentle motion of being carried in a ship or some other form of transport. The third sort of movement is only useful under the compulsion of extreme necessity. In no other circumstances should a man of sound mind undertake it, namely the remedy of doctors who are in the habit of using drugs as laxative medicines. Diseases, unless they are very dangerous, should not be irritated by drugs. For the whole constitution of diseases is rather like the nature of living beings. In fact the structure of living beings is bounded from the very beginning of their own generation by a set length of time. The whole genus is subject to this, and each being contains within itself its allotted life span from its birth, unless unavoidable events intervene. For the triangles, that is to say the proportional qualities, from the very beginning hold the life force of every one, and hold together for the purpose of life up to a certain time. Life is not prolonged for any one beyond this fixed time. The same rule of nature applies to diseases. If anyone tries to shorten them by drugs before they have run their allotted course of time, illnesses which were minor or rare usually become serious or widespread.

Therefore diseases should be treated and controlled by attending to diet in so far as each person has leisure for this, lest a difficult and dangerous disease be aggravated by drugs. So says Plato. The Florentine people often commend our Galileo[3] because he observes this rule. For this reason I, too, am full of praise for Lorenzo Martellini, a true doctor, and would also praise Tommaso Valeri—except that I am writing to him!

Farewell, and send my greetings to Antonio Benivieni, the skilled

[2] ms efficiendam vel conservandam

[3] ms Plato. Galileum nostrum

physician. Girolamo Amazzi, our delightful companion in the study of medicine and the lyre, sends his to you.

Once more farewell.[4]

[4] ms iucundus. Iterum vale.

82

Tempus parce expendendum

Time ought to be used sparingly

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

A THOUSAND greetings to you, my saviour after God. As soon as my hand could lift a pen, I considered it wrong to write to anyone else before writing to my sole patron.

On what, then, can I most ably write? Certainly I shall, if I may be so free, write to you now[1] about matters more serious than usual. Vineyards and the humble tamarisk do not always serve.[1] But what hinders you from writing now, Marsilio, seeing that he to whom you would write not only allows it but has long since in his own letters so commanded?

During my infirmity, Lorenzo, nothing afflicted my mind so bitterly as the memory of time ill-spent, and there remained nothing to console me save the remembrance of those things I had learnt, though I had learnt but little. For the divine soul delights only in the divine food of truth, by which it is nourished and strengthened. For the rest, the absurdity of fleeting trifles does not satisfy immortal mind, which by natural inclination demands the eternal and immeasurable. I beseech you therefore, dearest patron, through eternal God, to spend the most precious moment of time, short as it is,[2] cautiously and wisely, lest you ever have cause to repent in vain your prodigality and irreparable waste. Loss of time often

[1] ms Scriberem nunc

[2] ms brevissimum summum, parce,

brought Theophrastus to tears when he was eighty years old. Loss of time frequently, in my presence, made the great Cosimo sigh deeply when he was over seventy.

I beg you, set against foolish cares, empty pastimes, and unnecessary activity that Socratic saying: 'Begone, godless enemies! Begone, at once thieves of my soul, lest I am forced away from myself.' By degrees these steal you away from yourself, and lead captive the man born to rule. Free yourself, I pray, from this miserable captivity while you can; but you can only do it today; for the first time be independent today. Believe me, it is not wise to say I shall live; tomorrow is too late for living; live today. What I ask, Lorenzo, is easy. To spend one hour rightly and usefully is not difficult: use well, I pray, one hour each day for nourishing the mind in liberal studies, and that little time live profitably for yourself. For the rest, if you wish, live for others. As you know, you should often live for others if you wish to live for yourself. But do both for the sake of God. It was first of all for His sake that you were born, then for the sake of yourself and others. Moreover, indulge in games and jests seldom and sparingly, for God has appointed you to a greater role; indeed, and I know what I say, to the very greatest. These false pleasures, like lightning, vanish so quickly that they become their opposite at the very moment they appear. But make me no more promises for the morrow; promising what you neither have nor know that you will have. If it is only tomorrow that you eat or drink, my friend, will you not be dead in three days? Let this tomorrow die today, let it die at once, lest you yourself should die; nothing is more false than this tomorrow, which has deceived all men that the earth has brought forth.

Alas! Why do you carry on so foolishly, Ficino? Look! Either Lorenzo will frown or he will laugh. Both bad; or rather, both good. For I have come to know the quality of the Medici. From good nothing save good can spring. However, I am not warning Lorenzo with this letter so much as Marsilio and other mortals. We all labour most sorely under the disease of 'Leave that till tomorrow'. We scarcely have the present time, for we hold it so lightly, that we have not the power to retain it even for a moment. But the future is nothing; therefore no man possesses it. Oh demented, pitiable creatures! We put our hopes in nothing, and always squander the treasure we possess. But we wish to use to the full what we do not possess at all! Thus we are sick almost to the point of destruction. Therefore we should not entreat Galen or Hippocrates, but rather Aesculapius and Apollo.

Farewell today: if you count on tomorrow's welfare, you will never fare well!

But I wish to impress on this letter this seal: you should neither listen to flatterers, nor hearken to those disparagers with whom each great house abounds. The former try to tear out the eyes of your mind, and the latter to cut off your hands, that is your friends. The lie, God himself will at length destroy; but the truth He will guard. Trust in God alone, Lorenzo: I also trust in God.

Once more, farewell today!

83

Homo sine religione bestiis est infœlicior

Man without religion is unhappier than beasts

Marsilio Ficino to Benedetto Colucci, rhetorician of Pistoia: greetings.

You urge me to press on unremittingly in defence of religion, as I have begun. This I will try to do with all my powers, Benedetto; not because religion needs defenders of this kind, for it always withstands hostile assailants by the ordinance of God, whose will is ever to be praised amongst all peoples. But rather I shall do it because I seem only to live happily, indeed only to live at all, when I write, speak and think about the divine.

In fact I believe the human race would be less happy than any beast if it were deprived of the worship of God. I leave out of account its involved and ceaseless obsession with the helpless, feeble and continually ailing body. But if hope for the divine be removed, rational enquiry, the very activity which seems to make us superior to beasts, undoubtedly renders us more miserable than beasts through regret for the past, dread of the future, anxiety over the present, knowledge of evils and insatiable desire for innumerable possessions.

Blessed are the heavenly beings who know all things in light. Free of care are the beasts in utter darkness who understand nothing. Anxious and unhappy are men who between the two grope, stumble, and jostle in

cloud. Only the divine light can bestow on us truth and happiness through the fruits of devotion and the gift of mercy.

84

Responsio ad epistolam de tempore parce expendendo

Reply to the letter about the sparing use of time

Lorenzo de' Medici to Marsilio Ficino, the Platonic philosopher: greetings.

I WAS indeed delighted with your letter which reproved me for the waste of past time, in such a way that my idleness does not appear to have been entirely useless. For the result of my waste of this brief time is that directions have come from you which are not only for my benefit but for the benefit of all those who suffer from the same disease. You have often unfolded your mind to me, but in this letter of yours you seem repeatedly to have gone beyond every other proof of friendship in good will towards me. Perhaps this is because you are first in love and far exceed all others in friendship to me; perhaps it is because you are able to bestow abundantly those gifts of friendship which others cannot. For others who attend us with their kindness can bestow riches, honours, or pleasure. But those gifts are all in fortune's hand, so that we have nothing surer than their uncertainty nor more reliable than their inconstancy. This you have often taught and I have even more often experienced. But you are such a source of instruction and you show such friendship toward me that it is obvious you are second to none of my friends in virtue, as you surpass them all in love; and this you do from your own natural goodness. You do this moreover because you are aware that these virtues have been given to men by immortal God on this condition: that they are used for as many people as possible; and you cannot be tempted to misuse this divine generosity.

I am very glad indeed that your former health has been restored. I should be even more glad if, through attending to your letter, I could recover my former health of mind. Of this I do not despair, both because of your forceful instruction and also, as you know, because I go astray not

through ill intention but through habit and an easy-going nature. But your part, like that of an Apostle, is to expound, rebuke and plead. And because you know that I am stirred by means of this kind, do not cease to use those spurs on me which you judge best able to raise my debased mind. This I especially demand and expect from you because no one else wishes me so well, nor warns me so wisely.

Once more I rejoice both for your sake and mine that immortal God has restored you to us safe and sound. I have received as much of a reminder as you by this danger to your life. For the same fate which would have removed the darkness from your eyes would have extinguished the light from mine. Nothing can bring such light into my life as yourjoyful companionship and advice, which is of such authority and so full of love. If these failed so would that other part of my life, outside which everything else is nothing. By this danger I have been reminded that I should more freely and more often make use of you; and since our human condition is such that it is more effectively influenced by example than by reason I mean thus to profit more from both you and time; from time because it has no tomorrow, from you because you are a man for whom no moment is free from the dread of death.

Farewell and take care of your health.

10th October, 1474.
Florence.

85

Nemini recte volenti omnino ad bonum interclusus est aditus

Access to the good is wholly barred to no one of right will

Marsilio Ficino to Niccolo Michelozzi, a true man: greetings.

THOSE who refute anyone, Michelozzi, usually do so simply by contradicting them. But when Lorenzo de' Medici most agrees with me it is then that he completely refutes me.

For while he praises most artfully my letter in which I censure his waste of past time,[1] not even a moment of his own life does he appear to have spent uselessly. Now, Niccolo, if our patron is such a man that when negligent he appears to have been diligent, what sort of man do you think he would become, if willing and able to be diligent? I beg him to be so willing; but, that he may be so able, I implore God. Yet the need is not so much to implore God that he may be able to be diligent, as that he may be willing: firstly, because access to the good is not wholly barred to anyone of right will; secondly, because God heeds a true will rather than verbal entreaties.

Farewell, and urge Lorenzo to be diligent, so that in a short time he may be as far ahead of the Latin[2] people in learning, as he unquestionably is in authority over his citizens.

[1] ms iacturam praeteriti
[2] ms superet Latinos, quantum

86

Imitatio potior est quam lectio

Imitation is more powerful than reading

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

JUST as harmony has a more powerful effect when actually flowing into our ears[1] than when subsequently recollected, and as a battle stirs us more deeply when watched than when being recounted, so the outstanding deeds of illustrious men rouse us more to the pursuit of virtue and fashion us more perfectly for it than do the words of orators and philosophers discussing moral conduct.[1] For nature has so provided that things themselves have much more power than their names. And the truth itself moves the heart[a] more effectively than that which either bears the semblance of

[1] ms praesens aures nostras illabitur
[a] animum

truth or is untrue altogether. For this reason imitation of the Socratic way of life leads more people more surely to virtue than the moral teaching of Aristotle. And Christ alone by His example has been of greater profit to more people in leading them towards a noble and holy life than all the orators and philosophers with their words.

And so I praise you, my Lorenzo, because although you do not despise moral instruction you put example[2] first by a long way, as something living; especially as you have long since set as your example that venerable man, named by official decree 'Father of his country'. I speak of the great Cosimo, your grandfather and my patron, a man surpassing others in prudence, dutiful towards God, just and magnanimous towards men, in himself even-tempered, full of care for his family, yet watching even more carefully over the affairs of state; a man who lived not for himself alone but for God and his country. Among men no heart was more humble nor yet more lofty than his. Lorenzo, I discussed philosophy fruitfully with him for more than twelve years. He was just as sharp in discussion as he was wise and strong in government. Certainly I owe much to our Plato, but I confess I owe no less to Cosimo. For Plato put before me the concept of the virtues but once; Cosimo put them into practice every day.

I will not mention now the other good qualities of this man. Cosimo was as jealous and sparing of time as was Midas of money; and although he spent his days with the utmost economy and set great value on each hour, this man who was jealous of every moment would often deplore the hours he had wasted. Lastly he followed the example of the philosopher Solon, putting philosophy into practice excellently throughout his whole life, even in the most critical affairs, yet practising it best in the period when he moved from this world of shadow to the light. And, as you know, for you were there, shortly after we had finished reading Plato's book on the one origin of things[2] and the highest good,[3] he died, as if now about to drink deeply of that good itself which he had tasted in discussion.[4]

Farewell, and just as God created Cosimo as a model of the universe,[b] mould yourself on the model of Cosimo. Indeed you have begun to do so.

[2] ms longe praeponas: praesertim
[b] ideam mundi

87

Durate, et vosmet rebus servate secundis

Endure, and keep yourself from secondary things

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa: greetings.

LAST summer I sent a letter urging you most strongly to have faith. I made it clear that you were not born for little or mediocre things. But, at that time, you possessed little worthy of your merit, apart from your mind. Now see! through God's favour you have already attained mediocre things. To nearly everyone else these seem to be of the greatest importance, but to my Salviati they are mediocre. So hereafter great things await you, if any faith is to be placed in Marsilio, or rather in God.

It is still pleasant and right for me to prophesy like this, for when divine providence created you Archbishop of Pisa, it proclaimed me a prophet. I do not know which of us is the more to be congratulated, you as Archbishop or me as prophet; probably both of us equally, for since all things are in common amongst friends, if I prophesy I prophesy[1] for you; and if you reign, you and I reign together.

I wish you good fortune, and pray you take the greatest care of your health. For through you I see that the priesthood in Florence, long since dead, will shortly be restored to life. This letter cannot describe how much and how often our Giovanni Cavalcanti rejoices with me over this event. So let your mind conceive it.

Once again I wish you farewell, fortunate man.

[1] ms tibi vaticinor, sive

88

Divinitas animi ab inventione

Divinity of soul from invention

HITHERTO, most religious Lorenzo, I have only spoken to you on religious matters in your Church of *the Christian Religion.*[1] Having thus spoken through God, I considered a letter unnecessary. Today for the first time, when I had left the church after reciting Holy Office, I recognised that the help of a letter was needed.

Therefore, arise my letter, come on, attend! For today you must bear greetings to Pisa, to the one on whom the prosperity of Florence depends.

Marsilio Ficino sends greetings to his Lorenzo de' Medici.

What an extraordinary thing; it's too absurd! What has happened, my good Lorenzo? A moment ago I began well enough, it seemed to me. Now suddenly after my greeting, all invention fails. Perhaps this greeting is the sum of Marsilio's letter, beyond the greeting there is absolutely nothing to find. But it is not even a greeting, I think, to be bereft of invention.

Will you then bear nothing more, destitute letter? On the contrary, I still want you for a few words. See, in the meantime I have found something else for you to bear, absurd though it may be. Whence comes the fact that I find nothing? Stay, letter, take this. I have found a third point: I only know invention is lacking, because I usually find so many things.

But don't hurry off! First, please take a fourth point: that often poverty is recognised from abundance, as is loss from possession. Would you like a fifth point? Change the argument round. The desire for abundance, as if it were a possession, arises and grows from poverty, as if that were a loss.

But see, now a sixth point springs to mind, I know not how. Since desire has its natural origin in poverty, it is always poverty-stricken.

Nevertheless, the seventh point that can be made, is that the human soul is never impoverished, for it creates abundance even from poverty, weaves invention from its absence, and digs up gleaming silver and glittering gold from the darkest corners of the earth. This is surely the land of the living, where the good things are seen to be of God; this is the eternal land of the soul, whose fruit is inexhaustible and whose motion is continuous. The letter therefore implores us a thousand times to cultivate this land; for it offers us incorruptible fruits, most abundant and most sweet.

But I do not wish to impose too grievous a burden upon the small back of this letter.

Farewell then, impudent letter. And after the greeting, tell Medici to be happy and ask him to return.

89

Novum opus nimium placet opifici

A new work pleases the author too much

Marsilio Ficino to Angelo Poliziano: greetings.

This letter to Lorenzo, both when I wrote it and immediately afterwards, pleased me a great deal, as usually happens, but on subsequent consideration I found it less satisfactory. Yet, whatever its quality, it belongs to Medici. And, like the just man, I give to each what is his own.

If, over the years, anything very bad has come into your hands from the writings of the pedants, do read it to Lorenzo and then read my letter soon afterwards, so that in comparison it will not seem so bad. But listen! Read it nicely, I pray, sometimes in soothing tones, sometimes with a sonorous ring. Thus, at last he will perhaps be deceived by guile into bestowing a little praise, or at least will say, 'At any rate, Marsilio sends something. I prefer foolish servants to lazy ones, and even lazy ones to none at all'.

I gladly accept your commendation of Giovanni Piero of Padua to me. Philosophy also commends him, for he seems[1] to be a philosopher by nature as well as by study.

Farewell.

[1] ms esse videtur. Vale.

90

De perseverantia

On perseverance

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Altoviti: greetings.

THOSE who clasp us by the hand or by the neck pull the body, while those who engage the eyes attract the senses. But there are those who, through the ears and sense of hearing, carry away the heart[a] and mind. Now you, through the ears, have won my heart![a] Indeed, so much has already sounded in my ears of your constancy and quality, through the words of our Giovanni Cavalcanti, that I have neither the ability nor even the desire to refrain from greatly respecting and loving you.

For the time being, let the sign of our love be this letter, approving your constancy and encouraging your perseverance, for there cannot be one without the other. The prudent do not consider a man worthy of approval unless he has been fully proved by fortune; and he has not been fully tried unless he has persevered[1] to the very end. The measure of the goodness of perseverance is that while other virtues promise good things, perseverance fulfils them. And the more difficult it is, the greater is its merit over the others.

Then do not be afraid of difficulty, for the good works of men are very brief but their reward is everlasting. Furthermore, a mind burning with resolution brings light to the dark, melts the frozen, softens the unyielding and tames the untameable.

Farewell.

[1] ms usque perseveraverit. Quantum
[a] animum

91

Prudentis est nihil praeter salutem animi bonamque corporis valitudinem exoptare

It is the nature of a prudent man to desire nothing beyond the welfare of his soul and a healthy body

Marsilio Ficino to his Andrea Cambini: greetings.

THERE are, Andrea, many mortals who are so greedy that every day they want many different things; in fact the things they want are innumerable, as if they could never be satisfied.

As my Cambini is a prudent and moderate man, I assume that he desires nothing beyond[1] the welfare of his soul and a healthy body.

So, good health, and at the same time farewell.

[1] ms arbitror, optat

92

De musica

On music

Marsilio Ficino to Antonio Canigiani, a man both learned and wise: greetings.

YOU ask, Canigiani, why I so often combine the study of medicine with that of music. What, you say, has the trade of pharmacy to do with the lyre?

Astrologers might relate these two, Canigiani, to a conjunction of Jupiter with Mercury and Venus. They consider that medicine comes from Jupiter and music from Mercury and Venus. Followers of Plato, on the other hand, ascribe them both to one god, Apollo, whom the ancient theologians thought was the inventor of medicine and lord of the sounding lyre.

Orpheus, in his book of hymns,[1] asserts that Apollo, by his vital rays, bestows health and life on all and drives away disease. Furthermore, by the sounding strings, that is, their vibrations and power, he regulates everything: by the *hypate*, the lowest string, winter;[1] by the *neate*, the highest string, summer; and by the *Dorians*, that is, the middle strings, he brings in spring and autumn. So, since the patron of music and discoverer of medicine are one and the same god, it is hardly surprising that both arts are often practised by the same man. In addition, the soul and body are in harmony with each other by a natural proportion,[2] as are the parts of the soul and the parts of the body.[2] Indeed, the harmonious cycles of fevers and humours and the movements of the pulse itself also seem to imitate this harmony.

Plato and Aristotle taught,[3] as we have often found from our own experience, that serious music maintains and restores this harmony to the parts of the soul,[4] while medicine restores harmony to the parts of the body. Since the body and soul correspond with each other, as I have said, it is easy to care[3] for the harmony of both body and soul in the same man. Hence Chiron practised both arts, whilst the prophet David is said to have soothed the soul as well as the body of the mad Saul with his lyre.[5] Moreover, Democritus and Theophrastus maintained that this can be done in the case of other diseases, of both the body and the soul. And Pythagoras, Empedocles and the physician Asclepiades proved this in practice. Nor is this any matter for wonder. For sound and song arise from consideration in the mind, the impulse of fantasy[6] and the desire of the heart, and in disturbing[4] the air and lending measure to it they vibrate the airy spirit of the listener, which is the link between body and soul. Thus sound and song easily arouse the fantasy, affect the heart and reach the inmost recesses of the mind; they still, and also set in motion, the humours and the limbs of the body. This indeed was shown by Timotheus when,

[1] ms voce, hyemem. Neate,
[2] ms quoque corporis invicem
[3] ms colere. Hinc
[4] ms aere fracto et

by sounds, he roused King Alexander to fury and then restrained him; not to mention the miracles of Pythagoras[7] and Empedocles who could quickly quell lust, anger or madness by serious music. Then again, using different modes, they used to stimulate lazy minds. And there are the stories told[5] of Orpheus, Arion and Amphion.[8]

But let us get back to the matter in hand. The first music takes place in reason, the second in fantasy and the third in words; thence follows song and after that the movement of the fingers in sound. Lastly the movement of the whole body in gymnastics or dancing. Thus we may see that the music of the soul is led by steps to all the limbs of the body. It is this music that orators, poets, painters, sculptors and architects seek to imitate in their work. Since, therefore, there is such strong communion between the music of the soul and of the body, is it surprising that both the body and the soul may be set in order by the same man?

Finally, anyone who has learned from the Pythagoreans, from the Platonists, Mercurius[9] and Aristoxenus,[10] that the universal soul and body, as well as each living being, conform to musical proportion, or who has learnt from the sacred writings of the Hebrews that God has ordered everything according to number, weight and measure, will not be surprised that nearly all living beings are made captive by harmony—nor will he blame Pythagoras, Empedocles and Socrates in his old age, for playing the lyre. Rather will he consider Themistocles ill-educated for refusing a lyre[6] offered to him at a banquet. Our Plato showed in *Alcibiades*[11] how music is the special concern of those men of knowledge who worship the Muses. He said that the Muses engender music, and that music was named after them. Plato does, however, criticise plaintive and light music[12] on the grounds that it leads to lack of spirit, lechery and bad temper. But he recommends solemn and calming music as the most wholesome medicine for spirit, soul and body.

For myself, to say something of your friend Marsilio, this is why, after my studies in theology and medicine, I often resort to the solemn sound of the lyre and to singing, to avoid other sensual pleasures entirely. I do it also to banish vexations of both soul and body, and to raise the mind to the highest considerations and to God as much as I may. This I do with the authority of Mercurius and Plato, who say that music was given to us by God to subdue the body, temper the mind and render Him praise. I

[5] ms Amphione narrantur. Verum
[6] ms qui lyram sibi

know that David and Pythagoras taught this above all else and I believe they put it into practice.

Farewell.

93

Verissima laus est, quae laude digna est

The truest praise is that which is worthy of praise

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Aurelio of Rimini: greetings.

YOU praise my lyre, Aurelio, with songs worthy of praise. I, in turn, will praise your songs with the lyre. Would that[1] my lyre were worthy of praise so that what you say[2] were true. Then I should sing truly[3] and both of us[4] give the truest praise. The truest praise is that which is worthy of praise.

Farewell.

[1] ms Sed utinam laude
[2] ms vera loquaris. Ego
[3] ms Ego vere canam
[4] ms uterque nostrum verissime

94

Fœliciter amatur, qui a viro amatur amore dignissimo

He is fortunately loved who is loved by a man most worthy of love

Marsilio Ficino to Bernardo Bembo, the Venetian Orator: greetings.

I THOUGHT, Bernardo, such was my love for Marsilio, that never could I love him more. Since every man loves each single thing for the sake of

himself, and himself in each thing, it is himself that he loves most. But happily yesterday my opinion proved quite wrong, as I then began to love myself even more than usual when I discovered that I was most certainly loved by you, a man worthy of love above all others. Indeed, so highly do I esteem Bernardo, that I value myself as highly as I feel I am valued by him. So who can ever please me more than he through whom I am daily better pleased with myself? Would that I might always please you, Bernardo, and thus displease none of the wise.

And[1] for your love towards me, what return can I make but love? Other things are usually acquired at the cost of something else. But since love is born of its own free will,[2] it is therefore free and is never bought or sold at any price but itself.

Farewell.[3]

Florence.

[1] ms displiceam. Ergo amori
[2] ms voluntate nascatur
[3] ms Vale

95

De lege et iustitia

On law and justice

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

I PROMISED Lorenzo, on his return to Florence from Pisa on the seventh of March, if I remember rightly, that I would write to him when he next went to Pisa. Usually I write to friends because I wish to; on the present occasion I shall write because I must. It is just to keep a promise, for law ordains it so. So accept a just and lawful letter. No! To speak more truly, whenever I wish to write, then write I must, by the law of love; when I must write, then I also wish to, for the love of law. So today you will receive a letter written of my own accord and in accordance with the law.

To separate the voluntary from the just or the just from the voluntary is not lawful for anyone and is unpleasant for friends. So, Marsilio, you now both must, and wish to write to Medici.

Of what can you principally write, and which god will be your guide? Oh salvation of mankind! Oh Justice, Queen of the world! For a long time you have given me cause to write; now, I beseech you, provide material so that I may fulfil my promise as successfully with your aid, as I gave it gladly when you commanded.

That divine law[1] by which the universe abides and is governed, kindles in our minds at their creation the inextinguishable light of natural law, by which good and evil are tested. From this natural law, which is a spark of the divine, the written law arises like a ray from that spark. Moreover, these three laws, divine, natural and written, teach each man what justice is, so that there is scarcely any room left for sinners to plead complete ignorance as an excuse for their faults.

These three lights show the eye of the mind that justice is really a quality of will, which is directed and strengthened by reason, so that, despising threats and enticements, it decides to act only as divinity, nature and citizenship dictate. What does divinity instruct but to give back to God, from whom we receive everything, every insight of the mind, every desire of the will, the energy of every action, and the reward of work?[1] What else does nature teach, if not that we should make wealth subject to the body, the body to the soul, the soul to reason, and reason to God?

Finally, citizenship seems to teach that each citizen should remember that he is a member of the state.[2] Therefore it is right for men to love their country as if it were one body,[3] and fellow-citizens as members of that body. And so a man will be considered indisputably just who reverences God as his Father and Lord with utmost piety. He will carefully restrain his feelings and emotions;[2] he will love all men as his brothers; he will love himself in God and all men in himself; he will cleave to God with all his strength and, so far as he is able, he will unite others with himself in the divine nature. Therefore it is the duty of a just man to render each his due;[3][4] to those above, honour and respect; to equals, family companionship; and to those below, support and advice.

Furthermore, when he is appointed an officer of the Government, he will have the law always in view as if it were God. He will not, indeed,

[1] ms vim, operum merita

[2] ms venerabitur. Affectibus motibusque suis diligentissime

[3] ms cuique quod est suum

consider himself a master of the law, but its faithful interpreter and devoted servant.[5] In administering it he should punish offences impartially and with even temper. Without envy he should reward virtuous actions according to their worth. He should not give thought to his own interests but rather to those of the community. Neither should he trust in his own ability, but he should seek advice in all matters from elder men, those who are prudent and god-fearing. That, too, should remain deeply impressed on his mind.

Lay aside your proud and pompous looks, you to whom the ruler of the sea and land has given the great jurisdiction of life and death. Whatever a lesser man[4] dreads at your hands, with that a greater Lord threatens you. Every authority is subject to a greater authority.[6] Let that be enough about what justice is; what a just man is; and what is his duty.

Moreover, how important the fruit of just action is, is very clear, because neither home, state, army, nor business of any kind, whether of good or bad men, can endure without a just distribution, made according to merit. In fact, if it is so vital to the structure of the world that its removal would mean the world's immediate[5] destruction, its importance for the life of men cannot be expressed. Indeed, if justice were not present amongst men either they would herd together in one place and quickly perish at each other's hands or they would live scattered to be separately torn to pieces by wild beasts. Oh eternal bond of the human race! Most wholesome cure for our sickness! Common soul of society! Justice that is blissful life! Justice that is heavenly life! Mother and Queen of the golden age, sublime Astrea[7] seated among the starry thrones! Goddess, we beg you, do not abandon your earthly abode, lest we miserably sink into the iron age. Heavenly goddess, we beseech you, ever live in human minds,[6] that is, in citizens who belong to the heavenly country, so that for the present we may imitate the divine life as well as we can, and that in the time to come we may live it to the full.

Farewell.

[4] ms vobis minor extimescit
[5] ms sit protinus ruiturus
[6] ms numen mentes humanas

96

De anima

On the soul

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco Tedaldi, his friend: greetings.

Lattanzio Tedaldi, as dear to me as a friend as he is to you as a son, has returned to me from you the short work in which the views of the Western philosophers about the soul are set forth. Now Marsilio Ficino is asked what he thinks on this subject.

Although it is not my part to resolve arguments of such importance between them, yet, since they ask what I think, the books I have written on the *Immortality of Souls* will explain this very fully and I hope they will be sent to you shortly. Meanwhile, I will give a very brief reply regarding that part of the discussion which they especially desire.

First of all, I know that my soul is substance; otherwise I could not fully understand and define substance. I would be nothing more significant than a chance attribute,[a] nor could I judge and evaluate how far an attribute[a] falls short of substance. I know that my soul is not corporeal and mortal; for if it were, I would not understand the incorporeal and immortal, and distinguish them from the corporeal and mortal. I know that it is rational; otherwise I would not know how to bring reason to bear on the soul and other matters. I know that, although it partakes of reason, yet it is not reason itself, as some think; if it were I could not wander from the truth in ascribing reasons to things, and wander from reason in conducting my affairs. He who declares that the soul is reason departs from reason more than he who denies this.

Similarly reason is either substance or quality. If reason is substance, it is like existence; it is the all, perfect and utterly boundless. The soul is not of this nature; only God is. If reason is a quality, it is clearly an attribute and faculty of the soul rather than the soul itself. But no one would venture to assert that the soul is itself a quality and an attribute, for it freely rules the body by shaping its substance, moving it in opposing directions and making it stand still, and in some way having the power to assume opposing qualities by turns. For how can it be called either an attribute or perishable? It runs impartially through everything, through the classes and kinds of

[a] accidens

both substance and attributes. It also turns back upon itself, sometimes through desire, sometimes through knowledge, and for that reason it is also life itself, since it cleaves to itself, not to anything lower. It acts without the bodily instrument whenever it reaches towards and chooses the incorporeal, and correctly distinguishes it from the corporeal. It often resists the inclination of the body, and is not at rest there. Moreover, the more it withdraws itself from the body, the more effectively it understands and the better and happier it is. The soul, therefore, is an incorporeal rational substance, fitted to direct the body.

Many of the Platonists think that the soul precedes the body,[1] but the Peripatetics think the contrary. I believe that those Western philosophers whom you commend are Peripatetics even though you do not say so. For, as you say, they discussed the soul after a banquet as if they thought that the body should be refreshed[1] before the soul could be brought into being. For my part, although I created the little soul of this letter before dining,[2] I nevertheless agree with them about the order of creation.

Farewell, and see that you continually take part in these discussions, for in this way you will care for your body at the same time as your soul.

My friend Giovanni Cavalcanti commends himself to you. And please commend me to those philosophers of yours.

[1] ms recreandum deinde animum
[2] ms etsi ante epulas

97

Consolatio in amici obitu

Consolation on the death of a friend

Marsilio Ficino, the Florentine, to Bernardo Bembo, the Venetian orator: greetings.

Tell me, Bernardo, what is it that you mourn in a friend's death? Is it death? Or is it the person who is dead? If it is death, mourn your own, Bernardo. For as surely as he is dead will you too die; or rather, you are

dying; for from moment to moment your past life is dying. If it is the dead person you mourn, is it because he was bad, or because he was good? If he was bad, you are well rid of such a companion; and you should not grieve over your blessings. If he was good, which I prefer to think since he is loved by a good and prudent man, surely for him it is good to live removed from the continuous death of the body. It is not right to grudge a friend such great blessings. Perhaps you grieve because you no longer see him anywhere as you used to. However, was not this man your friend in that he loved you? Now what was it that loved you? Was it not the soul itself, the soul which also knew you? But you saw his soul no differently then than now; and you see it now no less than then.

You will perhaps complain of his absence. But, as souls do not fill space, they become present not in any particular place but in thought. When you do not consider him you cannot be sad. But when you do consider him, which you do as you please, you at once recall his presence. You should never complain about his absence then, unless perhaps you object that it is not the way of the free soul to commune with the one now imprisoned in your body. Separate the mind from the body, Bernardo, if you can, and, believe me, your souls will quickly meet. But if you cannot do this, do not doubt they will meet a little later whether you will or no. For if we compare our life to our will, it is exceedingly brief; if we compare it to the age of the world, it is but an instant; and, compared to the age of God, even less than an instant.

Farewell, and live in God, since He alone is eternal life. He alone drives death and the sorrow of death far from His worshippers.

98

Legitimi iurisconsulti partes

The role of the true man of law

Marsilio Ficino to Pier Filippo Perugino, the illustrious man of law: greetings.

Astronomers say that the faculty of law belongs to Jupiter and the Sun,[1] who for beauty are unmatched in the heavens. What, therefore, is more

beautiful on earth than an impartial interpreter of justice and law? What, on the other hand, more shameful than a biased interpreter?

I see that you want to consider the cast and nature of the true man of law. What a beautiful and wonderful spectacle! His soul is the worship of God; his spirit is the care of his country's law; his brain, clear-sighted judgment; his eyes and tongue, doctrine; his breast, strong memory; his heart, right will; his hands, the performance of right will; and his feet, perseverance; the whole, justice and dignity.

But why do I describe the ideal[a] of a man of law in words, while Pier Filippo, like a painter, is depicting himself[1] in his pupil, Francesco Soderini, thus achieving the true likeness of the ideal itself? Assuredly, even if suspicion of flattery prevents me from declaring that Pier Filippo is himself such a likeness, nevertheless the truth compels me to say so. His teacher desires that Soderini should also be such a man. The pupil's talents and the promise he has shown point to this. His father, the distinguished knight Tommaso Soderini, earnestly desires it. Our Girolamo Amazzi, a very dear friend of his, guarantees it. Marsilio Ficino hopes and prays to God for it.

[1] ms more seipsum in
[a] idea

99

Velociter comparatur quod ardenter desideratur

What is ardently desired is swiftly obtained

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Altoviti: greetings.

You write in your letter that your soul longs to fly to me. But if it does not have wings it cannot. Nor should it wish to do what it cannot. If it does have wings, which I prefer to believe, no sooner does it desire to fly than it does so, since neither time nor place can obstruct eternal and spiritual

wings. So you already possess, if I am not mistaken, what you were so eagerly seeking.

May what you have be as valuable to me as it is easy to acquire and precious to possess for you, so that Marsilio may possess it no less in fact, than does Giovanni value it in thought.

Farewell. Our Giovanni Cavalcanti begs to be remembered to you.

100

Fontes potius quam rivulos sectari debemus

We should pursue sources rather than streams

Marsilio Ficino the Florentine to Giovanni Piero of Padua: greetings.

In our times there are many who are not philosophers but lovers of philosophical show, who in their arrogance lay great claim to being masters of Aristotelian thought, although they have heard the words of Aristotle himself very seldom and only for short periods. Even then they have understood little, since they have heard him not speaking his own words in Greek but stammering some one else's in a foreign tongue.[1] When they hold forth amongst the youths in the market place, these men seem to the crowd to know a great deal. But if you question them carefully at home you will find that they know little[1] of physics, less of mathematics, and least of all[2] of metaphysics.

Such men are still boys, even when they are seventy years old, being devoid not only of eloquence but of grammar. They ponder too earnestly, not natural, or divine matters, but certain usages of a foreign tongue which[3] they stupidly confuse and confound. Thus these vain sophists introduce matters for discussion more suited to a gathering of boys than a

[1] ms interroges, pauca in

[2] ms Mathematicis, paucissima Metaphysicis

[3] ms excogitant, quas invicem

group of men. They speak in such a way that you condemn philosophy because of their discourse, and they live in such a way that you censure philosophy because of their lives. Our Plato therefore rightly called them not the husbands but the adulterers of philosophy, from whom he said illegitimate sons, that is, absurd opinions,[2] are begotten amongst the philosophers.

This is the reason, my friend, that I commend you for not copying the childish stupidities and vain works of these men, who do not drink deep from the source but sip at streams, who do not follow the light of truth but foolishly pursue the shadow of opinion. Know that in the end you will come closest to truth if you take great care to avoid the paths of erring men.

Remember me to our Bernardo Bembo, the illustrious Venetian orator. Farewell.

101

Peripateticus non ut philosophus est, pecuniam appetit, sed ut homo

A follower of Aristotle does not seek money as a philosopher, but as a human being

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

I WOULD warmly recommend to you the outstanding Aristotelian philosopher Oliviero Arduini, had his book on Aristotle not already done so very effectively. If Aristotle, who considered money necessary for happiness, could have written his books without financial assistance, then this philosopher also could interpret Aristotle's works without a salary. So you will understand what Oliviero wants; he is an Aristotelian, not a Cynic![1] You may say it is not for a philosopher to seek these things. Be that as it may; he asks not as a philosopher but as a man. Once you have agreed to

give help we will discuss whether or not it is appropriate for a philosopher to ask for it!

Farewell. Lorenzo Buonincontri of San Miniato, the astronomic poet and poetic astronomer, sends you his greetings.

102

Commendatio a fortuna quondam fœlici, innocentia, scientia

A commendation from former good fortune, innocence, and knowledge

Marsilio Ficino to Donato Acciaiuoli: greetings.

I COMMEND to you most highly the Marsuppini, men who were once quite prosperous but who are now, alas, almost destitute but never, to my knowledge, resentful.

From the depths of his heart, the poet Carlo especially commends to you his son Carlo. If it please you, listen to him for a while and, if you can, give him sympathetic hearing. He prays you, if not by virtue of your humanity and wisdom then by recourse to divine mercy, not to desert today this learned youth, who is the soul of innocence and his father's only hope.

It is not fit for the Muse to become a beggar or for Innocence to be made wretched. Therefore, O Patron of the Muses,[1] help this child of the Muses who, without your aid, must perish.

14th April, 1474.
Florence.

[1] ms Patrone musarum, musarum

103

Qua ratione sit quisque laudandus

The reason for praising someone

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

You write that in future I should be more sparing in praising you. And you write in such a way that while you appear to bridle me, you spur me on to praise you more vigorously. But I will restrain myself for the present. I must go no further. In the letters which I have written to you, Lorenzo, I have hitherto always praised you so as to guide you, and at the same time[1] encourage you. I have always advised you to recognise that you have all things from God, to give Him thanks, and to commit yourself wholeheartedly to Him. I have encouraged you to persevere, for a beginning arises from desire or chance, but perseverance springs from virtue.

I have indeed sometimes praised you rather freely in my[2] letters to Niccolo[1] as though you were absent. You read these whether I like it or not; for you are so close to Niccolo that you consider that what is written to him[3] is written to Lorenzo. Your love towards Niccolo therefore deceives you in judging me, much more than my love towards you deceives me in judging you.

I still love Lorenzo more than I praise him, and I formed my opinion of him before I loved him.

Farewell.

16th April, 1474.[4]
Florence.

[1] ms admonerem simul atque
[2] ms epistolis meis ad
[3] ms ad eum scribuntur
[4] ms Vale 16 April

104

Nemo sine amore, de amore bene loquitur

Without love no one speaks well of love

Marsilio Ficino to Niccolo Michelozzi, a true man: greetings.

You have written[1] me a love letter, Niccolo; almost more than a love letter. Only a lover, Niccolo, writes love letters so beautifully. Let the whole of that book which I once wrote on love, be my reply to your letter.

Perhaps I write too little because I consider too many things in penitence. I have greeted your friends, as you ask. Such[2] greetings do not convey very much. They prefer to greet you when present[3] rather than be greeted by you indirectly.

Commend our Antonio Calderini to Lorenzo.[4]

Farewell.

16th April, 1474.
Florence.

[1] ms Scripsisti ad me epistolam
[2] ms salutationes huius modi non
[3] ms malunt praesentia tua
[4] ms Salutari. Antonium Calderinum nostrum Laurentio commendato. Vale.

105

Praecepta ad memoriam

Precepts for memory

Marsilio Ficino to Banco, the arithmetician: greetings.

If you want memory of good things to be strong, try to forget the evil. It is worth sinking useless thoughts into the river of forgetfulness so that you retain those of value.

Avoid the onslaught of the passions, Banco, and the tumult of much activity and many thoughts. Do you wish to think usefully? Then have very few thoughts, and those of a kind that very few think. This is what Pythagoras meant when he said: 'Turn aside from highways and walk by foot paths.'[1] Why do people wander around so heedlessly? Shrewdness and discrimination are needed, for the hare lies hidden in a small clump of grass. Evils lie everywhere, while the good is reduced to narrow limits.

Do you want to have a powerful memory for what is good? Then take care to learn the reason behind what has to be learnt. For reason[1] is the indissoluble bond between truth and memory. This is perhaps why our Plato said that what has once been well understood can never be entirely forgotten.[2], [2] You should commit things to memory which are[3] not just useful, but also agreeable. Foods which are most pleasant to taste pass more easily into our nature and become part of it. And the more eagerly anything is drunk, the longer it is retained.

In addition it should be especially noted that Aristotle and Simonides[3] think one should always remember that there is a definite order present, or at any rate an order that may be deduced, in what has to be learnt. The order consists in a particular proportion and sequence. When[4] things have been arranged in an ordered sequence, if one thing comes to mind the rest immediately and necessarily follows, either by a natural or a deduced connection. And if the mind's attention is directed either to one thing, or to a few things as if they were only one, it acts more powerfully than if it is divided among many things. Just as the complete[5] order and connection of the parts bring to unity the whole composed of those parts, so they also bring to unity the attention of the mind itself.

We must, moreover, take care that we often reflect on what we have learnt. For in this way the food of the mind[a] is digested and, as it were, turned into mind.[a] Indeed it is of the greatest assistance if what has been committed to memory is often repeated in fine language and sweet song. For enjoyment is the seasoning of things: it is the food of love, the kindling of genius, the nourishment of will and the strength of memory.

A sense of wonder, too, is very important, for through it the mind[a] is

[1] ms Rationem. Ratio enim
[2] ms oblivioni tradi
[3] ms utilia sint, sed
[4] ms his autem quae
[5] ms omnis autem partium
[a] animus

made more attentive and deeply imprints the features of things on its own inner substance. Thus, as boys experience greater wonder because things are new to them, they also retain the memory of them longer. Perhaps they also have fewer thoughts than men, and let us add, much clearer ones. But more of this another time.

If one is to believe the medical profession on this subject, the brain should often be purged with aloe and tended with the scents of cinnamon and marjoram. I certainly do not dispute this, but I recommend far more the cleansing of the soul. For this must first be purged of evils in order to be filled with good.

Farewell: that is to say, give your soul good fare. But you fare well if you feed it, not on great quantity but on the best quality.

13th August, 1458.[4]
Fighini.[6]

[6] ms alueris. Idibus Augustiis. Fighini.

106

Virtutum definitio, officium, finis

The definition, function and end of the virtues

Marsilio Ficino to Antonio Calderini: greetings.

You often ask me, Antonio, to define the virtues for you, expecting from me perhaps those very detailed analyses[1] of the Aristotelians and Stoics. Calderini, this is not the way of our school of Plato. Surely the power of virtue lies in unity rather than in division. Hence the Pythagoreans held that unity belonged to the good, diversity to evil. So I shall be very brief in my definition, especially as it is better to practise the virtues than to know about them.

Virtue is a quality of the soul which leads a man by discrimination to

[1] ms Stoicorumque partitiones, Calderine

bliss. Of the virtues there are two kinds.[1] There are those in the intellect and there are those in the heart,[a] which may or may not be governed by reason. The first are called reflective virtues and the second moral.[2],[2] The first are so called because they are developed in reflection and once developed are used for this purpose. The moral virtues are so called because they are acquired by practice and custom and, once acquired, are based on moral conduct and useful works.

Amongst the reflective virtues are wisdom, contemplation of the divine; science, which is knowledge of natural laws; prudence, that is an awareness of the proper ordering of private and public affairs; and lastly art, which is the true measure in accomplishing any work. Amongst the moral virtues are justice, which freely gives each man his own; courage which, ever ready for true work, casts from us the burden of fear; and lastly temperance, which dispels the wanton desire for pleasure, the other obstacle to true work. Justice is accompanied by generosity and magnanimity, and the other virtues likewise have their companions.

To sum up, reflective virtue is simply an acquired clarity of the intellect, and moral virtue is a constant warmth of heart kindled[3] by that clarity. We should remember that of the human virtues none is more precious than discrimination.[3] As Plato observes in the *Republic*, to buy this one should sell everything else. For everything is an obstacle and nothing of use to a man who cannot distinguish the good from the bad and separate the bad from the good.

Do we not wish to attain this faculty of discrimination? Then in all matters we should consult elder and more proven men. First of all we should consult time. For among temporal things what is more ancient or better proven than time? But we consult time if we consider well and often the events of the past. For the past is master of the present and future. And consideration of the future instructs the present. For it is very difficult to deal properly with events of the present if you do not consider the end and issue of each action. Consider what is appropriate and leave the rest to God. Whatever follows, welcome as an action of God. For whoever rejects divine governance is rejected by God. Since God is indeed the beginning and end of all things, we are born not for ourselves but for God. Those virtues that have been described above are virtues to the extent that they are practised by us for the sake of worshipping, imitating and

[2] ms istae morales. Illae

[3] ms claritate subcensus. Meminisse

[a] in appetitu

realising God. The worship of God is therefore the virtue of virtues. But the reward of the virtues is the realisation of God.

107

Animae natura et officium, laus historiae

The nature and duty of the soul; the praise of history

Marsilio Ficino to Jacopo Bracciolini, son of the orator Poggio, and heir to his father's art: greetings.

EVERY year the early disciples of Plato used to hold a city festival in honour of Plato's birthday.[1] In our own times the Bracciolini, his modern disciples, have celebrated the occasion both in the city and the surrounding countryside. Our book on love records the country festivities at the home of the splendid Lorenzo de' Medici at Carreggi,[2] whilst in the city of Florence the festival was celebrated at princely expense by the richly gifted and noble-minded Francesco Bandini.

I was among the company when you, Bindaccio Ricasoli, our Giovanni Cavalcanti and many other members of the Academy sat down to the feast. Of the many different things we discussed at that gathering, I often reflect especially on the conclusion we reached before the feast, about the nature of the soul. I will gladly remind you of it now, for nothing befits a man more than discourse on the soul. Thus the Delphic injunction 'Know thyself' is fulfilled and we examine everything else, whether above or beneath the soul, with deeper insight. For how can we understand anything else fully unless we understand the soul itself, through which everything must be understood? Does not a man abuse the soul by not devoting himself to its study, when it is by means of the soul and for its sake that he wants to understand everything else?

We all agreed there that the reasonable soul is set on a horizon, that is the line dividing the eternal and temporal, because it has a nature midway between the two. Being in the middle, this nature is not only capable of

rational power and action, which lead up to the eternal, but also of energies and activities which descend to the temporal.[3] Since these divergent tendencies spring from opposing natures, we see the soul turning at one moment to the eternal and at another to the temporal and so we understand rightly that it partakes of the nature of both. Our Plato placed the higher part of the soul under the authority of Saturn, that is in the realm of mind and divine providence, and the lower part under Jupiter, in the realm of life and fate. Because of this the soul seems to have a double aspect,[4] one of gold and one of silver. The former looks towards the Saturnine and the latter to the Jovial. But this looking carries both desire and judgment. It is better to love eternal things than to judge them, for they are very difficult to judge rightly but they can never be wrongly loved. They can never be loved too much; indeed they cannot be loved enough until they are loved passionately. But it is better to judge temporal things than to desire them. Usually they are judged well enough, but basely loved. A judge takes within himself the form of the object being judged, whereas the lover transports himself into the form of the beloved. It is better to raise to ourselves inferior things by judging them, than to cast ourselves down through loving them. It is better to raise ourselves to higher things through love than to reduce them to our level by judgment.

Farewell.

But before I draw to a close I beg you, my Bracciolini, not to lose your enthusiasm for writing history, now that you have begun. For historians praise the style of your prose and the subject itself is very necessary for the life of mankind, not only to make it more agreeable but to found it upon tradition. What is in itself mortal, through history attains immortality; what is absent becomes present, what is ancient becomes new. A young man quickly matches the full development of the old; and if an old man of seventy is considered wise because of his experience of life, how much wiser is he who covers a span of a thousand or three thousand years. For each man seems to have lived for as many thousands of years as the span of history he has studied.

Once more, farewell.

108

Tres vitae duces, et una vitae optima ratio

Three guides for life, and the one best principle for living

Marsilio Ficino to Lorenzo Franceschi: greetings.

THERE are three guides for the life of man. First is principle, which has been long and carefully tested; the second is experience, strengthened by long practice; and third, the authority of those ancients who could not have been easily deceived by anyone, and who appear not to have wished to deceive others. Attend more to what a man has done than to what he has said, for many speak well but few act well.

The best principle for living is to think, and to do your utmost to live in harmony with the mind, for this is to live for ever and to live happily.[1] For it is in the mind that stability and peace are found. The man who falls from the mind sinks into hell. Do not set your heart upon a long life in the body, for a long time in the physical world is nothing if you compare it to eternity. Besides this, in the life of the body we are a prey to a host of trivial vexations. The life of the body is a penance, worthy to be called the death of the soul. Strive for this one thing before all else, as our Plato counsels in *Gorgias*,[1] so that during the time God allots to you here, you may live as well as possible. In this way the torments of ever-lasting misery are avoided, and with divine help the foundations of eternal and blissful life are laid.

[1] ms est enim semper feliciterque vivere

109

Ratio docendi, laudandi, vituperandi

The principle of teaching, praising and blaming

Marsilio Ficino to Lorenzo Lippi, the rhetorician: greetings.

SINCE you have studied the Greek and Latin orators, I take it that you teach your pupils always to remember that their audience must be swayed

not by what is pleasing, but by what is right. For he who urges what is just will win his case most easily, for of course he has Justice as his patron. Let them be mindful of their own integrity, because if a man's life is a lie, his speech will give him the lie. Facts carry greater weight than words, and the speaker who is most deeply moved himself will move others most deeply, whereas the man who sings one tune and plucks another from his lyre totally offends the ear. Divine music is the true harmony of thought, word and deed.

When about to praise or blame anyone, your pupils should remember that the nature of matter, time and space is vast; hence nobody is so wise and good that none wiser or better may be found, nor on the other hand can anyone be so foolish and evil, that there is no place for someone more foolish and more evil. Praise, therefore, should be sparingly given, and blame more sparingly still; further, by praising they should encourage and instruct. No one is more deadly a murderer than the flatterer, who does everything in his power to kill the soul. Therefore, rather than praise persons let them praise virtues, and God, the fount of all virtues. Such is the part of the true philosopher. The other is the way of the flatterer. Let them censure the fault, which is the act of a friend, not blame the man, which is the act of an enemy. It is evil they should loathe, not men. Let them study, not how to injure men but how to remove vice.

Let them study to be good rather than learned, for learning begets envy which goodness destroys. Goodness is both more useful to men and more pleasing to God than learning. It is also more enduring. We forget more quickly some fact which was quickly learned than we lose principles of conduct which we have attained by arduous daily practice. Learning in itself brings little of value, and that for only a short time, while goodness is eternal and leads to the realisation of God. Therefore, following the example of Socrates, advise your pupils to use human learning to dispel the clouds of the senses, and to bring serenity to the soul. Then will the ray of truth from the divine sun illumine the mind, and never in any other way. That is the only useful study. A man who acts otherwise labours vainly and miserably.

Thus, Lippi, shall your pupils bring you honour. It is not their books, but their disciples, that have brought glory to the divine teachers, Pythagoras and Socrates; or rather it is books, but living ones, for a book is a disciple without a soul, but a disciple is a living book. And, Lorenzo, what you have freely learned from God, the master of all truth, freely teach. It is utterly wrong that knowledge, which is by nature free, should

bear a price. All praise to him who has learned without reserve, and who teaches without jealousy. Whatever flows out from the pupils, flows back to the teacher. I beseech you, teach without stint. We may count our pupils as our spiritual[a] sons. And if fathers beget their bodily children with pleasure, why should not teachers also beget their spiritual[a] offspring with joy?

Show in yourself an example of good conduct. Purity of life engenders reverence for the teaching. The young eagerly take up the example of their elders. Those who corrupt a younger man, or indeed the mind of anyone at all, whether by words or conduct, must be held guilty of sacrilege. Finally, do according to Pythagoras[1] and Apollonius of Alabanda[2] who, in the tradition of the Indian philosophers did not admit any young men to their discipline except those of fortunate birth and the best education. For it is not fit that the Muses become either ministers of wantonness or the tools of iniquity.

Farewell, and convey my good wishes to Albertino of Cremona, a true philosopher, that is, a model of learning and honesty.

[a] animae

110

Cognitio et reverentia sui ipsius omnium optima

Knowledge and reverence of oneself are best of all

Marsilio Ficino speaks of mankind's salvation, which is knowledge and reverence of oneself.

Know yourself,[1] offspring of God in mortal clothing. I pray you, uncover yourself. Separate the soul from the body, reason from sensual desires; separate them as much as you can; and your ability depends on your endeavour. When the earthly grime has been removed you will at once see pure gold, and when the clouds have been dispersed, you will see

the clear sky. Then, believe me, you will revere yourself as an eternal ray of the divine sun and, moreover, you will not venture to contemplate or undertake any base or worthless action in your own presence. Nothing at all can be hidden from God, through whom alone is revealed everything that is revealed. Nothing of yours lies hidden from the mind, the everliving image of God who lives everywhere.

If the venerable countenance of a monarch of old inspires awe, you should always and everywhere reverence the wondrous presence of God, the king over all; and of mind, the queen over the body. Rightly therefore did divine Pythagoras give the instruction, 'Honour thyself'.[2] But he who, in the presence of himself, is not ashamed to think of worthless things and suffers the soul, which is by nature divine, to serve its servant the body, and plunges this divine pearl into the mire, such a man surely seems ignorant of his own worth and has not considered that divine saying: 'Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels';[3] and the words which follow. Again: 'I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you are children of the most High.'[4] Alas most ignorant minds! Alas blind hearts! I beseech you, arise now from this deep slumber; come to yourselves one day, I beg you. For if you come to yourselves you will live happily. Why have you been looking at the ground[1] for so long, divine men? Look up, citizens of the heavenly country, denizens of the earth. Man is an earthly star enveloped in a cloud; but a star is a heavenly man.

O soul, you are mighty, if[2] small things do not satisfy you. You are most virtuous when evil displeases you; most beautiful when you shun what is base. When you set small value on the transient you are indeed eternal. Since your nature is such, if you wish to discover yourself I pray you seek yourself where such things are. Truly the great is only found in that place where no limit is imposed; the best where no adversity reaches; the beautiful where exists no disharmony; and the eternal where there is no flaw.

Therefore seek yourself beyond the world. To do so and to come to yourself you must fly beyond the world and look back on it. For you are beyond the world while you yourself comprehend it. But you believe yourself to be in the abyss of this world simply because you do not discern yourself flying above the heavens, but see your shadow, the body, in the abyss. It is as if a boy leaning over a well were to imagine himself at the bottom, although it is only his shadow he sees reflected there, until he

[1] ms quid humi tamdiu

[2] ms anima si te

turns[3] his gaze back to himself. Or it is as if a bird flying in the air and watching its shadow were to believe it flew on the earth.

Therefore leaving behind the narrow confines of this shadow, return to yourself; for thus will you return to spaciousness. Remember that there is immeasurable space in the spirit, but in the body one could say infinite constriction. This indeed you can see from the fact that numbers, which are akin to the nature of spirit, increase without limit, but do not so diminish; whereas there is a limit to the expansion of the physical, to its contraction[5] there is no limit.

[3] ms aciem non convertit

III

De divinitate animi ac religione

On the divinity of the soul and on religion

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco Bandini: greetings.

When others are writing to Marsilio Ficino and his Achates, Giovanni Cavalcanti, they write two letters, assuming that where they see two bodies therein must also be two wills. But Bandini, who, so to speak, has eyes like a lynx, perceiving only one, wrote a letter to only one. In his letter he calls Marsilio immortal and divine, since he does not consider the fleshly covering, but sees through to the inner man, to his very soul, which being given from God to man is immortal and divine. O Bandini, how penetrating you are; for, in one moment of insight, you perceive what first took me ten years to discover, by way of long and tortuous paths, and then five years to write about in eighteen books.[1] The opening of this work begins to reveal, step by step, the divine nature of the soul, which you seem to understand already. It starts with these words: 'Since Man, with his restless mind, feeble frame, and desire for everything, leads a harder life on earth than the very beasts, then, if nature were to appoint

for him exactly the same limit of life as for other creatures, no animal could have a sadder lot than he. But it is not possible that Man, who by worship of God comes nearest of all creatures to God, the source of happiness, could be the least happy of all. Therefore it is only after the death of the body that his greater happiness may be achieved; and it surely follows that when our souls leave this prison some measure of light survives.'[2]

But enough of this Bandini; continue as far as you can to look at the inner nature of everything. Then you will never be deluded. Just looking at the surface reveals only shadows and dreams. The centre[1] is the pivot and substance of things.

You promise to honour us as soon as you can. Some while ago you honoured the divine Plato and his followers in magnificent style. With your promise you honour us already. For when a truthful man, such as Bandini, makes a promise, it is already fulfilled.

Farewell.

[1] ms somnia. Centrum est

112

Consolatio in alicuius obitu

Consolation on someone's death

Marsilio Ficino speaks words of divine consolation to Antonio degli Agli, the theologian and Bishop of Volterra.

If it were appropriate to console someone who can and does console others, I would now write a letter of consolation to you on the passing of your brothers. However, I shall not console Antonio; I shall plead with him. I implore you, reverend father, by God Himself, the life of all that lives, be not so much concerned for the earthly death of your brothers, as for their heavenly life. Nor should you follow your own will so much as the divine, a ready consent to which is indeed the only duty, true wisdom

and supreme happiness. Events which are necessary and unfavourable for others become voluntary and favourable for the man who submits to the will of the universal ruler.

But how could I be so foolish as to offer medicines to Hippocrates? Physician, heal thyself, or rather entrust yourself to God's care, since you know full well that there is no remedy against the poison of earthly death except ardent love and continual contemplation of the heavenly life and the life beyond heaven.

Farewell.

28th April, 1474.
Florence.

113

Contra mendaces et impios detractores

Against liars and impious slanderers

Marsilio Ficino to Bernardo Pulci:[1] [1] greetings.

You say[2] that your brother is a great disgrace to you because everyone regards him as deceitful and unreliable. I cannot deny that a man is a liar who exercises a venomous tongue and pen irreverently and insolently against the divine majesty, which is truth itself. Men assert nothing more truly of him therefore than that he is a liar. But why do I not find him unreliable? Because he is so persistently reliable in his ways that he has already grown old in his unreliability and spite.

Correct your brother's faults if you can, although to cure so long-standing a disease is very difficult, and to correct so abominable a vice perhaps impossible; for that angel who is said to have fallen for rebelling only once against God never rose again. If you cannot correct them, at

[1] ms Marsilius Ficinus Bernardo Pulcio salutem
[2] ms Ais fratrem

least bear those faults patiently; for God tolerates his insults, perhaps because He knows that the man does not understand what he is talking about.

Your brother's vices do not hide your virtues, Bernardo,[3] but highlight them: for your whiteness shines more brightly beside his blackness. Do not therefore be less constant yourself in good conduct than your brother is in bad, so that you may do good as successfully as he does ill.

[3] ms garriat. Bernarde, non

114

Contra mendaces et impios detractores

Against liars and impious slanderers

Marsilio Ficino to the distinguished Bernardo Rucellai: greetings.

Do not be too disturbed[1] Bernardo, if giant Pulci[2] snarls ferociously at everybody. A dog barks because of his nature and habit, and a quarrelsome fellow like this only ceases to bark when he ceases to live unless, perhaps, he joins Cerberus in barking even after he is dead!

But tell me, Bernardo, how can his barking harm anyone? It even makes people more watchful and cautious; and since it is common knowledge that he always abuses the upright either from envy or dissimilarity, the man will be thought most upright whom Pulci[3] has most abused. I would certainly rather be censured by the words of an unjust man than by the facts themselves; but an unjust man in fact censures anyone he praises in words, for such a man is taken to be his friend and like him.

Every man who disparages others, necessarily disparages himself first, for he is guilty of envy and slander. So far does a man degrade the tongue who uses it for evil purposes! Evil speakers may defile their mouths with

[1] ms nimium perturbari, Bernarde
[2] ms si giges pulcius adversus
[3] ms maxime pulcius improbaverit

curses, but we may not defile ours. If we detest bad smells, we should know that nothing smells worse than a bad mouth,[4] and that it is more important to remove dirt from our mouths than from our clothes; foul talk is a sign of a corrupt mind. Therefore we must take great care lest we are infected by evil example. We should not care what the small-minded say of us but what men say, and less about that than what truth itself says. If something false is thrown at you, despise it, have confidence in the truth; but if it is true, turn the abuses of your enemy to your improvement. Do not turn to the idle breath of common gossip whether favourable or unfavourable. The divine soul should depend on nothing except God.

Now you are striving in vain to correct that lost soul, the giant Pulci,[5] for the madman neither hears nor listens to reason. That wicked man will never spare good men, for he has never respected God. How can a madman, who hates God, love men who are the images of God? You ask me to correct him with whatever principles I can. You ask me to plough the sea shore. No one attacks divine matters more aggressively nor more foolishly than the little man[1] you ask me to correct. That Thersites[1] should be punished rather than corrected. What an abomination, that he should with impunity disgorge such invective from his venomous mouth against God! And what a mouth is this! One that was created by God for God's praise.

I need not accuse our present generation of anything, Bernardo, except that it has produced this small but evil portent.[6] It is said that in ancient times a presumptuous war was declared by the Giants against Jupiter, but in these times a pathetic war has been declared by dwarves against the most high God.

You commend[7] the wretched monster[8] to my discipline. Assuredly, if he had had a brain as well as energy he would have been utterly poisonous to the human race. Hercules might have overlooked this man from contempt. Marsilio rejects him because he stinks.

Farewell and next time ask for something easier.

[4] ms ore malum. Non tam a veste quam ab ore detergendae
[5] ms conaris gigam pulcium
[6] ms quod portentum istud
[7] ms Pigmeis. Commendas meae
[8] ms disciplinae monstrum miserabile

115

Quid est fœlicitas, quod habet gradus, quod est aeterna

What happiness is; that it has degrees; that it is eternal

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

At Careggi recently, when you and I had discussed at length many aspects of happiness, we eventually arrived through reason at the same conclusion. You then perceptively discovered fresh proofs why happiness lies in the action of will rather than the action of intellect. You wanted to set down that discussion in verse, and wished me to do so in prose. You have just fulfilled your duty with an elegant poem,[1] and so, God willing, I will now carry out my task as briefly as possible.

There are reckoned to be three kinds of human good.[2] These are of course the benefits of fortune, of the body and of the soul. The benefits of fortune consist in wealth, honour, favour and power. And so to begin at the beginning; wealth is not the highest good, as Midas believed, for it is sought and acquired not for its own sake but for the convenience of the body and soul. Nor are honour and favour the highest good, as Augustus used to say, since they are at the discretion of another and are often not experienced by us; and very often, they are bestowed or withdrawn irrespective of merit. Nor is power the highest good, as Caesar maintained, since the more people we control, the more acutely are we harassed by worries, the more dangers we are subject to, the more men and the more business we have to serve, and the more enemies we have.

The benefits of the body consist in strength, health and beauty. Strength and health are not the supreme good, as Milo of Crotona seemed to think, for we are cast down[1] by the most trifling discomforts; nor is beauty,[2] so much honoured by Herillus the Sceptic. No one, however beautiful, could live content in this alone, and beauty is a benefit for others rather than for the beautiful themselves.

Some benefits belong to the irrational and others to the rational part of the soul.[3] The benefits of the irrational part are the keenness of the senses and their enjoyment. Aristippus thought that the highest good lay in both of these. We believe that happiness lies in neither; not in keenness of sense,

[1] ms offensiunculis subiicitur. Neque

[2] ms Neque enim pulchritudo, qua Scepticus

for in this[3] we are surpassed by many animals and a keen sense generally disgusts as often as it delights; nor does the highest good consist in the enjoyment of the senses, for this is preceded by longing, accompanied by doubt and followed by regret. One short pleasure is purchased by much prolonged pain. And the intensity of this kind of pleasure lasts only as long as the demands of the body; consider how drink is sweet only as long as one is thirsty. But every demand of the body is a kind of annoyance. Sensual pleasure, therefore, because it is frequently mixed with its opposite, that is pain, is neither pure nor true, nor does it satisfy. And if anyone says that there are some sensual pleasures which do not spring from the demands of the body, I reply that these are so weak that no one finds any happiness in them. Indeed, let no one venture to ascribe happiness to that state which consists of the keenness and delight of the senses, since this state is false, fleeting and anxious. Trifling amusements do not satisfy the soul, which by natural inclination seeks finer things.

Some good qualities of the rational part of the soul are said to be natural, such as a keen intellect, memory and a bold and ready will. Happiness is not in these, for used well they are indeed good, but badly used they are evil. Other good qualities of the rational part of the soul, such as the moral and reflective virtues, are acquired. Is happiness found in moral conduct, as the Stoics and Cynics believe?[4] Certainly not, for the practice of moral virtues such as moderation and endurance is full of toil and difficulty. We will not find the goal we seek in toil, but in rest, for we are endlessly busy to enjoy leisure, and wage war to live in peace. Besides, right conduct is never sought for its own sake but put to use, like a medicine, for cleansing and calming the mind. Neither is Epicurean peace[5] the ultimate goal. For the use of a still mind is the contemplation of truth, as the use of a clear sky is to admit sunlight.

Does happiness then reside in the virtues of reflection, such as the contemplation of truth? Certainly it does. But there is, so to speak, contemplation of different kinds: sub-celestial, celestial and super-celestial. Democritus set as his goal[6] the first of these. Anaxagoras was not satisfied with this, because the celestial is higher than the sub-celestial, but he was willing to be content in the contemplation of the celestial for, he said, he was born to contemplate that, and heaven was his homeland.[4] But Aristotle disagreed with this[7] because the consideration of the super-celestial seemed to him altogether more deserving. He thought happiness

[3] ms quia ex hoc

[4] ms suam patriam affirmavit

consisted in the highest activity of the highest power directed to the highest purpose. The soul trapped in a body is able to consider these things in one way, and the soul which is free in another. Aristotle believed that man in the first state is happy, but our Plato denied this, since consideration of the divine in this life is always mixed with uncertainty of intellect and unsteadiness of will. So, according to Plato, true happiness is the property of the soul which, when freed from the body, contemplates the divine.[8] Both angels and God are accounted divine. Avicenna and Al Ghazzali seem to maintain that the soul will be happy in contemplating angels. The Platonists refute this for two reasons. The first is that it is the nature of our intellect to look for the cause of things, and then the cause beyond this cause. For this reason, the search of the intellect never ceases, except it discovers the cause behind which there is no cause, but[5] is itself the cause of causes, and that is God alone. The second reason is that the desire of the will cannot be satisfied by any good so long as we think that some other good remains beyond; therefore it is only satisfied with that good beyond which there is no other. What else is this but God? Therefore in God alone may the search of the intellect and the desire of the will come to rest. The happiness of man therefore consists in God alone, from which it follows that nothing can rest except in its own cause. And since God alone is the real cause of the soul it rests in God alone. But we discussed these things more fully in the *Theology of the Immortality of Souls*.[9]

However, there are two activities of the soul in its relationship to God, for it sees God through the intellect and it rejoices in the knowledge of Him through will. Plato calls the vision[a] ambrosia, the joy, nectar, and the intellect and will, twin wings by which we may fly back to God, as though to our father and homeland. This is why, he says, when pure souls ascend to heaven they feed at the divine table on ambrosia and nectar.[10]

In that happiness the joy surpasses the vision. For as we find more merit with God in this life by loving Him than by searching for Him, so the reward in the next life is greater for loving than searching. We find far more merit by loving than by searching for many reasons. First, because no one in this life truly knows God. But a man truly loves God, no matter how he understands Him, if he despises everything else for His sake. Second, just as it is worse to hate God than to be ignorant of Him, so it is better to love Him than to know Him. Third, we may make ill use of the knowledge of God, for instance through pride. We cannot misuse the

[5] ms sed causa

[a] visionem

love for Him. Fourth, the man who looks for God pays Him no tribute, but he who loves Him yields to God both himself and all he possesses. So it is that God gives Himself to the lover rather than the investigator. Fifth, in investigating God, we take a long time to make very little progress, but by loving Him we make much progress in a very short time. The reason love unites the mind with God more swiftly, closely and firmly than cognition is that the power of cognition lies mainly in making distinctions but the power of love lies in union. Sixth, by loving God, not only do we experience greater joy than by seeking Him out, but we are made better people. For these reasons we may conclude that the reward of loving is greater than that of human enquiry.

It befits the lover to enjoy and rejoice in the beloved for that is the aim of love, but it befits the seeker to see. Thus joy in a happy man surpasses vision. Besides we desire to see in order to rejoice; we do not seek to rejoice in order to see. We can find the cause for our desire to see, but we cannot find the cause for our desire to rejoice, other than the very joy itself, as though it is desired for its own sake. We do not desire simply to see, but to see those things that make us rejoice, in a way that makes us rejoice. Nature herself never rejects any joy, but[6] she sometimes rejects cognition, and indeed she rejects life[7] too if she thinks that it will be very burdensome; so that delight is not only the seasoning of cognition but also of life itself. When this is removed everything seems tasteless. Joy is richer than cognition, for not every man that knows rejoices, but those who rejoice necessarily know. Just as nature considers it worse to suffer misery than ignorance, so it is better to rejoice than to know. And just as nature always and everywhere avoids pain on its own account and everything connected with it as being the greatest evil, so she pursues pleasure on its own account, and other things connected with it, as being the highest good. Since the power of cognition, as I have said before, lies mainly in making distinctions, but the power of love lies in union, we are united more closely with God through the joy of love than through cognition, for joy transforms us into beloved God. Just as it is not the man who sees the good, but he who desires it, that becomes good, so likewise the soul becomes divine, not by considering God but by loving Him; as timber becomes fire because it draws heat, not light, from the flame.[8] Hence, since the soul is not goodness itself what is good for it must be

[6] ms tamen aliquam interdum

[7] ms etiam vitam, si

[8] ms quia lucem ab igne capiat sed quia calorem

sought outside its own nature. It follows that a turn of the will, so that will is directed towards what is outside, is more truly based on goodness itself than an intellectual concept which remains something purely internal. For the intellect grasps the object by a kind of imagery, but will strives to transfer itself to its object by natural impulse. Desire, which is wide-ranging and continual, is rooted in being since all created things are always desiring something. Cognition acts through images that are received; it is the property of few beings and is intermittent. Therefore the enjoyment of goodness is more substantial through the medium of desire than[9] through the vision of cognition.

If God were to separate the mind from the will and keep the two apart, the mind might seem to retain its previous form, for it would still be a form of reason; but the will might change its form since it would be a desire lacking the power to choose, a property of reason. But the mind would not enjoy any further good at all; it would be like a creature without taste; nothing would please it; it would find nothing good, nor would it be agreeable to itself or anything else. But will would continue to enjoy to the full some goodness of its own. Therefore enjoyment of the highest good seems to be the property of will rather than intellect. The end of movement, that is happiness, rightly pertains to will, since that is the aim of movement at its outset. The intellect, understanding things, not[10] so much through their nature but rather through its own, seems to draw things towards itself and for that reason it cannot really be said to move the soul. Since will desires to perceive things as they are in themselves, it draws the soul to things outside itself; and therefore it is will that is the origin of movement. Moreover the end of all movement is outside the soul but is finally connected to the soul as form. Through will the soul greatly rejoices in this end, for the labourer is worthy of his hire. The concern and impulse to attain the good and to avoid evil are based on desire. The will receives a greater reward from God than the intellect, not only because it enjoys Him more fully, but also because the discovery of happiness belongs to will. The more ardently a man loves, the happier he becomes in that he approaches the very substance of happiness itself. What shall we add to this? Since far more people can love God ardently than can know him clearly, the way of love is safer to mankind and[11] far

[9] ms est quam per
[10] ms cum non tam quam pro
[11] ms est et ad

more suitable for the infinite good, which wishes to impart itself to as many as possible.

So it is through will that happiness is attained. Again, what more? Free movement is the property of reasonable beings,[12] and because it is free a man may therefore advance beyond any finite limit whatever, to achieve all that he deserves, so that he can rise above the bliss of many of the angels; indeed, we can rise above them by loving and rejoicing rather than by apprehending. Therefore, by cognising God, we reduce His size to the capacity and understanding of our mind; but by loving Him we enlarge our mind to the immeasurable breadth of divine goodness. By the first we bring God down to our own scale, by the second we raise ourselves to God. For our cognition is measured by our capacity to understand; but we love Him not only as far as we perceive Him but also as far as we may conceive His divine goodness extending beyond what we can clearly see. When dimly and feebly we look into the depth of God's infinity, our love burns warmly and eagerly and so does our joy. Vision is not the measure of joy as some believe, for he who sees little may love much and *vice versa.*

Finally, the highest good for the soul is what satisfies it, but it is not really satisfied with its own vision of God. For the vision perceived by the eyes of the soul is a created thing and limited by degrees of perfection, just as the soul is. Yet the soul is never satisfied with any created or finite good. So vision is not the highest good. The soul is satisfied by the God who is seen, rather than by the seeing of Him. The enjoyment of the good in sensual perception arises not because the good moves sense but because sense is reflected, turned towards and diffused in the good which is presented to it. This spiritual turning and diffusion is delight, as we explained in our book on delight.[11] Thus, even for the mind which has been separated from the body, so to speak, the enjoyment of God does not primarily arise because God reveals Himself to the mind, which in any case is an act of God rather than our own,[13] but it arises because the mind turns to God, and this is joy.

It should not be thought that the soul turns to the vision[14] of God to rest in that, but turns rather to the God who is seen; it desires the vision for what is seen which becomes joined to the soul as form. In the

[12] ms liber animalium rationalium
[13] ms quam nostri actus
[14] ms visionem suam sese
[b] visum

same way there is no relish in the tasting of a flavour, but in the flavour that has been tasted. A craving does not have an imaginary object but a real one; otherwise the desire might be appeased by remembering or imagining the good when it is absent. The vision of God is imaged within us and, as I said before, is limited. For this reason an act of will, which is the turning towards and diffusion of the substantial into the infinite God, partakes more of the infinite than an act of intellect, which is conception of God according to the mind's capacity. Therefore God is the greatest good. Bliss is the enjoyment of God and we enjoy God[15] through will. Through will we move towards God by loving Him, and by being joyful we are enlarged and turned towards Him.

Different souls enjoy different virtues and different ideals[c] of God, and each excels in that virtue in which he particularly delights in this life and which he has followed to the best of his ability. All men, however, enjoy God in His fullness for in these many ideals He remains one. The men who best possess God are those who have the best ideal of Him. Each man understands the wholeness of God according to his capacity and enjoys Him according to his love. For this reason, as Plato said, there is no envy in the choir of Heaven.[12] Because the happiest thing of all is to possess the object of one's love, whoever lives in the possession of what he loves, lives content and satisfied. For if two lovers share their enjoyment with one another, each will rest content in the possession of the beloved and neither will worry that the other may love someone more beautiful. Moreover, although in that respect some have more capacity than others, yet each finds fulfilment according to the limit of his capacity, so that he desires nothing beyond that. Let me add that any man who yields by loving desire to the will and order of divine justice, yields most willingly.

The blessed soul can never be removed from God. For that cannot be done by force. Where is the force that can be inflicted on a soul enveloped in the infinite power of God? Nor will the soul leave willingly, for the will is not moved to anything except by reason of the good, and once it has cleaved to that which is the principle of all goodness and understands it it is never moved from there to anything else. And since it is the nature of goodness to direct the force of desire towards itself, it follows that infinite goodness does so everlastingly. Again, since will finds rest in anything

[15] ms fruimur deo per
[c] ideis

according to its measure of goodness, in infinite goodness it finds infinite rest. But if the soul, even while involved in the movement of the body, chooses the happiness that is free from all change, it will do so far more when it is beyond movement. Nor can the lower parts of the soul divert the higher ones from this state, since the lower will yield to the higher for ever, when the soul turns toward the infinite existence of God.

Lastly, if ever the soul had to be separated from this state, either the soul would not realise it, in which case being ignorant of God it could not be happy; or else it would know, in which case it could not be happy either, for it would be sick and afraid. Therefore, he who once finds happiness in God finds it forever. Read happily, happy Lorenzo, what your Marsilio Ficino has written here about happiness, much of which you discovered yourself. The subject is treated briefly here as befits a letter, but more thoroughly in the books on *Love* and on *Theology*.[13]

The end. Praise be to God.[16]

Farewell.

[16] ms tractantur. Finis laus deo. Vale.

116

Oratio ad Deum theologica

A theological prayer to God

Marsilio Ficino to a dear friend, and admirable man, Bernardo Rucellai: greetings.

Above men, nothing is dearer to me than to speak with God. Among men nothing is dearer to me than to speak with you. God, our guide in life and source of our friendship, always hears what I say to you. You will now hear what I often say to God. I make use of this prayer to God each day, Rucellai, so that he may enlighten my mind and strengthen my

will. Use it yourself too,[1] sometimes, unless you happen to have a better one, for there is no one whom I would rather God favoured than you. On occasion I have heard our Lorenzo de' Medici, moved by divine frenzy, sing similar prayers to the lyre.[1] But now hear the prayer itself.[2]

O boundless light, observing yourself, seeing all things in yourself!
O infinite sight, shining from yourself, illuminating all!
O spiritual eye, whom alone, and by whom alone, spiritual eyes see!
O immortal life of those that see!
O all goodness of the living!

You fulfil the whole desire of Your lovers. You alone, God, kindle within us the desire for everything which is good. You alone are everything good. I beseech You, most pure light, I beseech You, through Yourself clear the clouded vision of the mind that I may see You, for You fire my frozen heart, whereby I thirst for You. Enlarge my narrow vision that I may see You, as You raise my downcast eye so that I look up.

For You penetrate my inmost being, O deep of the deeps, as You also raise me aloft, O highest of the high. What is it that penetrates my inmost being? What is it that lifts the highest in me? Certainly it is the miraculous rays of Your amazing goodness and beauty, that wonderfully pour through minds, souls and bodies, everlastingly. By these You work in me, though I do not know it; by these, I say, sole majesty, You attract me, compel me, consume me utterly.[3] See, already, see! I hasten breathless towards You, O matchless beauty. But ah! this lover of Yours limps haltingly. Alas! unhappy man, he limps! Stretch out Your holy hand to one who limps, O my hope, I entreat You. I beseech You, lead him You attract, welcome him You capture, cool him You burn, bring joy to him You torment. May You gladden him, O wonderful joy, source of all joys. For I know that whatever we desire is contained in Your unity, or rather it is Your unity we desire. If we like this or that good thing, it is clearly not because of this or that. In reality we want each good thing because of the quality of goodness in it. If the river of life, which runs through all things, flows from one spring of goodness, that is its own perpetual and abundant source, assuredly we long to drink from that source of goodness itself.

O eternal fount of all that is good, we thirst for You everywhere. And

[1] ms et tu aliquando
[2] ms orationem ipsam iam
[3] ms uris, o quantum

so our thirst is not quenched by this good or that good, or by both together, if we really see that goodness itself is above them both. And may You, our God, may You alone quench this burning thirst, You, I say, the goodness in all, lest You make all Your worshippers thirst so long in vain. O supreme mind, so far from forgetfulness, O supreme wisdom, without trace of folly. Nothing which You have made in Your wisdom is hidden from You. You despise none of those things which You create by Your bountiful will. And You create everything. Do You not care for the least of earthly things? Most certainly You do, and for those things which do not care about You. Do You not care for the least of them, feed them and fulfil them? Do You despise us alone, who alone on earth do not despise Your majesty? Do You allow us always to wander without rest, we who alone trust that we can find rest only in You? Mean ingratitude is far from the highest good. Deception is far from the highest truth. Alas! You deceive us wretches, indeed You deceive us, if You wound us with Your arrows, and compel us to sigh restlessly for You every day. Nor do You ever heal our wounds if You make us leave temporal things to serve You yet do not replace them with things eternal. You deceive us if You have ordained that those who zealously worship You should lead a life more wretched than beasts on earth, and yet do not reserve for them a happier life hereafter. But this You do reserve for us, so that we are all filled with hope, O saviour of the world, sole security and refuge of the human race, within whom all that is good for man exists, without whom nothing is good.

The perfect clarity of Your intelligence enlightens our intelligence so that it may gaze on You and take form within You; Your burning love kindles our desire to love You and unites us to You. And so Your eternal life continually renews our life within itself. And we, who are endowed with the intelligence of immortals and a will capable of ruling mortals, are first and foremost made for immortal life. By virtue of this,[4] the mind, united with eternity, is separated from temporal suffering. It partakes of the eternal to the extent that it subdues desires for the temporal. So every activity of the soul connects with eternity in its own way; will through willing, intelligence through understanding, life through living. Eternity which encompasses the lesser activities of the soul, has already embraced it in its first action, as life. And so, O best Father, both by law of inheritance and by Your gift we shall one day share Your bliss.

[4] ms cuius quidem virtute

But, we beg You, let us share it now. We beseech You, if it be Your will, let us share it now. If it is not yet Your will, because we are not yet worthy, at least let us not be enmeshed by the false allurements of this world, nor succumb to its threats and blows. Have pity on us, most tender Father, have pity on Your children, care for those that are Yours. We beg[5] you care for Your own and restore those whom You have created; of You alone are we born, since You alone can satisfy our mind and heart by Your pure truth and goodness. So have pity on Your children, banished in this forest full of woe, so far from their heavenly country. We beseech You have pity on us, who are Yours, who long for You both day and night, as for our father and country; for in one's own country there is peace and true good, in exile there is anxiety, false good and real evil. In life, then, we seem to be separated from evils only for a short time, and for a short time only taste something of true goodness and peace. For a short time, only through resolution of mind or devotion we cleave to You.

Rid us, dear Father, of what has separated us from You for so long: distrust, despair and indifference. Give back to us, dear Father, what unites us to You: true faith, firm hope and burning love. Give these back to us, O light of lights and life of the living, lest separated from You and left to ourselves we should, like the dead, at once sink into outer darkness. May we who have lived for You devotedly now live for You spiritually, as far as we are able. May we dwell in Your very being for ever. In You may we shine and burn, may we blaze and be made joyful. May we rejoice in bliss without end, beyond the measure of our desires.

May we, without distraction, infinitely love Your infinite beauty. May we without surfeit eternally enjoy Your infinite good.

[5] ms tuos oramus et

117

Quod soli virtuti Deoque confidendum et serviendum

That one should trust and serve only virtue and God

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco Salviati: greetings.

If anyone thinks that the cause of my long silence has been forgetfulness, he is wrong; indeed, I confess I owe so much to you, that I could forget myself before I could forget you. But I knew it was out of place to write about trifles to a very busy man; I wanted something important in your affairs to happen, which would prompt me to write a congratulatory letter to you, and I expected it every day.

I see that nothing has yet happened worthy of my desire and your deserts. Trust in God, Salviati. I know you were not born for small or commonplace purposes. So be of good heart and, as is usual to you, strong in spirit.[a] You will achieve great things if you are strong in spirit.[a] Certainly, most merciful God does not disappoint the hope of the faithful.

But why should I lament the death of Piero, our Cardinal?[1] Immortal God will not desert us, even if a mortal man has done so. Furthermore, in my opinion, Piero died young and prosperous perhaps so that he would not die old and miserable. Even if the prolongation of life is sometimes the reformation of character, it is often the decline or end of former prosperity. A man has lived a full life, my friend,[1] who—no matter how long he has lived among men—has deserved most highly of God. A man who has not yet made sufficient progress in understanding[b] and virtue, though[2] he live an hundred years, has not yet lived long enough. Finally, to speak briefly, no one lives long and happily save he who lives for eternal happiness.

Farewell, my friend.[3] Always remember what God has already often brought to your mind, that you should trust neither fortune nor men, nor should you serve anyone save Him, who is servant to none, who never wishes to deceive and who can never be deceived, who lacks nothing and who never suffers those that are His to lack anything.

Again, farewell. Our Giovanni Cavalcanti commends himself to you.

[1] ms Multum amice vixit
[2] ms profecit etiam si centum
[3] ms mi amice, semper
[a] magno animo
[b] ingenio

118

Qualis debeat esse imitatio

Of what nature imitation should be

Marsilio Ficino to Braccio Martelli: greetings.

I HAVE read the address of Bernardo Nuzzi, the rhetorician, to the learned and magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici. Our Nuzzi, it seems, has for a long time been drinking in and digesting Cicero. For in that speech a marvellous transformation is evident; Nuzzi has become Cicero and Cicero appears as Nuzzi. Such a transformation, it seems, took place between Homer and Virgil, and again between Aristotle and Theophrastus.

Remain, therefore, a pupil[1] of our Bernardo, for he is an outstanding rhetorician and, let us add, an excellent man. What he teaches others to impart he is already convinced of himself.

Farewell.

[1] ms nostri disciplina, hic

119

Saepe magna est laus quae brevis est

Often great praise is brief

Marsilio Ficino to the orator, Bartolomeo Scala: greetings.

I HAVE read Cristoforo Landino's Camaldolese dialogues.[1] In these books he enters the shrines of Virgil, imitates to perfection the dialogues of Cicero, and most happily portrays a happy man. Read the books; I know you will experience the same as I.

Farewell. But why, Marsilio, do you praise Cristoforo so briefly? Because he has a quality I cannot express.

Again, Farewell.

120

Qui favet bonis sibi favet

He who shows favour to good men shows favour to himself

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici: greetings.

PEACE be with you.[1] If you show favour to Pace, that good and learned priest, you will also show favour to me. For when something is done for a good man and a friend, it is done for me too.

Farewell.

[1] ms Pax tibi. Si

121

Quae sit petitio et commendatio iusta

A fair request and commendation

Marsilio Ficino to the magnanimous Lorenzo de' Medici:[1] greetings.

MANY seek undeserved honours from you, but Gregorio Epifanio deserves far more than he asks. Even though he is a great friend of mine, I recommend him to you more for his virtue than for his friendship. For he is a friend because of his virtue.

Farewell.

[1] ms Medici, SD.

12

Institutio et admonitio brevis episcopi

Brief instruction and advice[1] *to a bishop*

Marsilio Ficino to Giovanni Niccolini, the Archbishop of Amalfi: greetings.

I REMEMBER that when you were still a boy and visited our Academy with that very erudite teacher of yours, Cherubino Quarquagli, I advised you, as soon as you were old enough, to study the holy writings and laws and then to be ordained. I remember that your father, Ottone, the distinguished lawyer and knight, also repeatedly asked you to do this. This was because astronomy showed that you would be a distinguished man in the Church, and physiognomy indicated that you would be worthy of your priesthood, both in scholarship and conduct.

Now, which is most exceptional, you have, in your twenty-fifth year, through princely favour and successful guidance, been appointed Archbishop of Amalfi. For this, my good Giovanni, I heartily congratulate both you, as an Archbishop, and myself, as a prophet, because you have fulfilled the promise not only of astronomy but even more of physiognomy. Through the Church you can enter upon the Vicarship of God, and through your scholarship and conduct you can come near to God Himself.

It only remains that you should successfully carry out the office that, with God's help, you have so fortunately attained at such a young age. You will certainly succeed in doing this, if you always remember that you are a man, and that what you could not have attained without God without Him you cannot successfully govern nor happily possess; if you earnestly commit yourself to his care with pious mind and excellent works; if in all matters you consult older and experienced men; if you choose not what is pleasant but what is right, not what irrational feeling falsely blandishes, but what the careful assessment of reason allows; and if you remember that the true shepherd should be so pre-eminent in virtue that he is a model of all the virtues for his flock, otherwise the

[1] ms Institutio et admonitio brevis

faults of the shepherd infect the flock and the defects of the flock reflect dishonour and destruction on the shepherd.

But is there any need for Marsilio to instruct an Archbishop? The Epistles of Paul the Apostle have sufficiently instructed him already, as his letters and character make clear.

Farewell, fortunate man. And commend me to your uncle, Paolo, an upright and prudent man.[2]

[2] ms et commenda me Patruo tuo Paolo probo prudentique viro.

123

Laus Philosophiae oratoria, moralis, dialectica, theologica

Oratorical, moral, dialectical and theological praise of Philosophy

Marsilio Ficino to Bernardo Bembo, lawyer and knight, the Venetian orator distinguished for his learning and authority: greetings.

You ask why it is that, although I have praised the arts and many other things, yet I have never praised Philosophy, which I have always studied with such devotion. Giovanni Cavalcanti, my Achates, happened to ask the same question some days ago. My reply is: first, that what has been discovered by men may at any time be duly praised by them,[1] but that Philosophy, the invention of God, is far beyond human eloquence; secondly, in singing the praise[2] of each of these arts and activities, I have indeed been honouring Philosophy, inventress and mistress of them all. Indeed it is only by her power and eloquence that we give each art its due honour, and we consider each worthy of praise in so far as it shares the virtue and dignity of Philosophy. But because she is our mother and

[1] ms quandoque pro dignitate
[2] ms artibus celebrandis me

nurse, it seems that sometimes with perfect justice she demands her due honour from us, so if it find favour, let our praise begin.

Oratorical praise of Philosophy

Oh Philosophy, guide of life, seeker of virtue, scourge of vice! What would we be, what would the life of men be, without you? You have begotten cities, called scattered men into the fellowship of life, brought them together first within dwellings, then in marriage, then in communion of tongue and letters. You were the inventress of laws, mistress of men's conduct and of discipline. But where is this unfamiliar digression leading? I do not know how I started this Ciceronian[1] oratory and song. Such melody may be sweet, but since Philosophy is as much the principle of song as of the subject which is sung, we must sing philosophically. So let us start this game afresh.

Moral praise of Philosophy

Philosophy is defined by everyone as love of truth and devotion to wisdom. But truth, and wisdom itself, are God alone, so it follows that lawful Philosophy is[3] no different from true religion, and lawful religion exactly the same as true Philosophy. If[4] the properties of words derive partly from the properties of things and partly from those of ideas, as Plato, Aristotle, Varro and Saint Augustine have shown in great detail;[2] then certainly Philosophy, the explorer and discoverer of the conception of things, brought forth Grammar, the measure of correct speech and writing.

If only Philosophy, or Philosophy above all, knew the nature of souls, the power of actions, the form of works, the arrangement of places, and the fitness of times, then it is she, above all, who taught the orators what to say, and how, whom they should persuade, and when. She also taught the poets what to describe, how to move the emotions and delight the soul. From this it follows that without her assistance historians could not serve their office.

Philosophy endowed states with souls when she made human laws on earth reflect the divine laws of heaven. She brought forth the body of the state and made it grow by providing agriculture, architecture, medicine,

[3] ms aliud, sit quam
[4] ms Philosophia. Si verborum

military skill and every other art which gives nourishment, elegance or protection to a state.

Then, above all, Philosophy removes misery from mortals, and bestows happiness upon them. For she discriminates good from evil and shows us how to avoid evil so that it does not hurt us, or how to bear it with strength so that it hurt us less. Furthermore, she shows us how to find goodness more easily, and how to use rightly the gifts that have either been bestowed on us by nature or fortune or acquired through work, so that they may be profitable.

I intended to end this letter here, dear Bernardo, and not make it longer than usual, for you know how much we dislike length, except in Plato, our fountain-head of divine eloquence; but the divine mother, whom we revere above all, protests too strongly. Listen, therefore, if you will, to the words she now demands from me, or rather which she presents to me.

Dialectal and Theological praise of Philosophy

Philosophy uses the tools of dialectic,[3] created by her own hand, to discover the truth in things through contemplation, the virtue in them through use, and the goodness in them through both. She thus suggests many principles for contemplation, many precepts for action, and much instruction for both. But of the many things she teaches I shall mention one in particular. The end is superior to those things that are related to it, just as a master is superior to his servants;[5] so it is quite right that external, mortal and bodily things should serve the body,[6] the body should serve the soul, the senses should serve reason, active reason should serve contemplative reason, and contemplation should serve God. Hence, all the arts which relate to outer things, to the body, to senses and to action, should be subject, and give place to contemplation as their queen. This is God's own activity. It does not need a special place or special instrument, nor does it serve outer things; of all things it is the most enduring, in fact it is everlasting. Its object is eternal. Everywhere it freely embraces that which is everywhere present.

If life is a kind of activity and the finer the activity the finer the life, then surely contemplation, being the most excellent of all activity, both because of its worth and its permanence, is also the greatest and most dis-

[5] ms tantoque ministeria quaedam

[6] ms corpora, corpori corpus

tinguished life; and, I would add,[7] the sweetest of all. For unlike sense[8] it does not deal with the impure, false and fickle delights arising from external[9] images but, possessing within itself the true and eternal causes and nature of everything, it purely, truly and permanently feeds on and rejoices at that which is pure, true and permanent. I say it takes boundless joy in the boundless and, what is most important of all, such a life, being most near to the life of God, is transformed into his perfect image.

So God is at once the light and eye of human contemplation and contemplation is the light and eye of action. Although this eye appears to be inactive, without it inactivity is bad but activity is worse; both are utterly dark and miserable. But at its command we work successfully in every activity. For mortals, wise philosophy points to this most blessed life, established at the summit of all things, revealing it now with her own eye, now with the finger of dialectic. As I judge, she also leads us to it in four main stages: moral conduct, natural studies, mathematics and[10] metaphysics.

The divine Plato considers that the heavenly and immortal soul in a sense dies on entering the earthy and mortal body and lives again when it leaves it. But before the soul leaves the body by the law of nature, it may do so by the diligent practice of meditation, when Philosophy, the medicine of human ills, purges the sickly little soul, buried under the pestilent filth of vice, and enlivens it with her medicine of moral conduct. Then by certain natural instruments she raises[11] the soul from the depths, through all that is compounded of the four elements, and guides it through the elements themselves to heaven. Then step by step on the ladder of mathematics the soul accomplishes the sublime ascent to the topmost orbs of Heaven. At length, what is more wonderful than words can tell, on the wings of metaphysics[4] it soars beyond the vault of heaven to the creator of heaven and earth Himself. There, through the gift of Philosophy, not only is the soul filled with happiness but since in a sense it becomes God, it also becomes that very happiness. There all the possessions, arts and business of mankind have their end, and of their number holy Philosophy alone remains. There, nothing else is true happiness but true Philosophy, when it becomes in fact the love of wisdom, as it is

[7] ms adde et omnium
[8] ms enim, sicut sensus
[9] ms ab extrinsecis rerum
[10] ms mathematicis, et metaphysicis
[11] ms infimo sublevans per

defined by the wise. We believe that the supreme bliss consists in a condition of the will which is delight in and love for divine wisdom. That the soul, with the help of Philosophy, can one day become God, we conclude from this: with Philosophy as its guide, the soul gradually comes to comprehend with its intelligence the natures of all things, and entirely assumes their[12] forms; also through its will it both delights in and governs particular forms, therefore, in a sense, it becomes all things. Having become all things through this principle, step by step it is transformed into God, who is the fount and Lord of them all. God truly perfects everything both within and without.

The mind of the truly philosophic man, like God, also conceives within itself the true and eternal causes of all things. But can we say that the human mind is able to create particular things outside itself? Let me leave aside the fact that the philosophic spirit imitates, and expresses exactly, the secret works of Almighty God, making them manifest in thought, words and letters, through different instruments and materials. But I think one thing, especially, should be appreciated:[5] not everyone can understand the principle or method by which the marvellously fashioned work of the all-skilled creator has been constructed, but only he who has the same genius for the art. No one could understand how the philosopher Archimedes put together bronze spheres, and gave them movements similar to those of the heavenly bodies, unless he were gifted with the same genius. And he who does understand, because he is so gifted, after recognising them may construct similar ones, provided that tools and material are available. Since the philosopher has seen the order of the heavenly spheres, whence they are moved and whither they proceed, how these movements can be measured, and what they give rise to, who can deny that his mind is virtually one with the author of the heavens himself? And that in a sense he would be able to create the heavens and what is in them himself, if he could obtain the tools and the heavenly material. For he does now create them, albeit of another material, nevertheless on the same design.

Oh most wonderful intelligence of the heavenly architect! Oh eternal wisdom, born only from the head of highest Jove! Oh infinite truth and goodness of creation, sole queen of the whole universe! Oh true and bountiful light of intelligence! Oh healing warmth of the will! Oh generous flame of our heart! Illumine us, we beg, shed your light on us and fire us, so

[12] ms apprehendit, formas

that we inwardly blaze with the love of Your light, that is, of truth and wisdom. This alone, Almighty God, is to truly know You. This alone is to live most blessedly with You. Since those who wander far from the rays of Your light can never see anything clearly, they are misled and frightened by unreal shadows, as though by terrifying nightmares, and are wretchedly tormented everywhere in perpetual night. Since they alone who live zealously with You see, love and embrace beneath Your rays those things which are true, eternal and immeasurable, they alone will regard anything limited by time or place as a shadowy dream of no importance. Thus they cannot be dislodged from the highest citadel of heavenly bliss, either by desire or fear of earthly things.

My Bernardo, I think that your Marsilio has already written as much as a letter can bear. So farewell, and fare fortunately, patron of philosophers; and as you have done hitherto, live continually in the blessed arms of holy Philosophy. I beg you live also ever mindful of Giovanni Cavalcanti, the heart of Marsilio.[6]

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Gratia iubelei

The grace of a jubilee

Francesco, the Cardinal of Siena, to Marsilio Ficino of Florence, the Platonic philosopher: greetings.

Dearest Marsilio, I hope you are well. Mindful of you and desiring the everlasting salvation of you and your family, we have obtained from His Holiness the Pope the grace of a Jubilee[1] for you and your aged parents.

Therefore give praise to God and with your parents strive single-mindedly for the incomparable gifts of divine grace. And pray for us.

Farewell. Remember us, O best of men.

4th December, 1475.
Rome.

125

Gratiarum actio

Giving thanks

Marsilio Ficino of Florence to Francesco, the Cardinal of Siena, immortal greetings for an immortal gift.

WHEN my parents and I read together the happy letter from you in which[1] you said that we had been granted the grace of a Jubilee by the Pope, we were overcome with joy. We were as those about to hear that blessed voice say: 'Come, ye blessed of my Father.' In fact my father suddenly exclaimed before us all: 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word.'

You are as splendid a giver as you seem fair and prudent in your demands. You give eternal, not temporal, gifts and you do not require of us temporal things but eternal ones, for you ask us to pray to God for your salvation. You ask most justly, for we owe much more than you ask. And you ask most prudently, for before you requested us to pray you took care that our prayers should not be ineffectual. So what you command we will perform, Venerable Father, as long as we live. Without doubt we accept your unique and divine gift as willingly[2] as you bestowed it. Be assured that we believe and openly confess that to him to whom we owe eternal life we owe even more our life on earth and all that is temporal.

Farewell, you who are happy in God, the author of happiness.

[1] ms tuam qua Iubelei
[2] ms libenter ut libenter singulare

126

Ociosae vitae utilitas

The usefulness of the leisured life

Marsilio Ficino to Andrea Cambini, Guardian of the fortress: greetings.

When strolling in the market place with our friend, the distinguished Francesco Casato, your fine letter was delivered to me, in which you say that you have now organised a life of leisure for yourself in charge of that fortress, and that in this position everything is available according to your desire; except the divine, which is missing. For this reason you ask me to give my book on religion to Francesco, the son of Berlinghieri, a man of learning and character, so that he can send it on to you.

First, I am indeed glad that you say you have found leisure in the heights of your fortress; certainly, only in the high watch tower of the serene mind does one find that heavenly and joyous peace. The deep valley of the senses is buffeted on every side by the currents of Acheron,[1] Styx, Cocytus and Phlegethon.[1]

But I can only wonder, when you add that in this leisure you are provided in abundance with human things, but with the divine not at all. For, as you know, since other things are outside us and only in particular places, they are sought in movement, activity and effort, but the divine, being within us and everywhere, is comprehended in stillness, leisure and peace. Thus if, as you say, you are truly at leisure it is only the human things you lack which all require excessive activity, but the divine you have in abundance, whose infinite light shining everywhere is reflected in the clear and penetrating eye of the mind as often as that eye turns toward it aright. But the eye of the mind, as if divine by its own nature, turns toward that light once it is not distracted by the anxieties of human affairs. In fact to be turned toward the divine sun is simply not to be turned away from it.

But why are you asking for our *Religion*,[2] dearest companion? In my opinion you are already sufficiently religious if, through leisure, you have been freed from cares about lower things and by your nature have been reunited with the peace of the highest.

[1] ms undique Acherontis, Stygis

But ah! While I write I see what my companion wants. Everyone knows why handsome men take much more pleasure in mirrors than ugly ones do; thus my Cambini, being a man who has already become thoroughly religious, desires my book on divine matters as a mirror in which he may perceive his religion as his own reflection. I shall send this mirror of mine, as soon as I can. Or rather, to put it more correctly, I shall direct the pupil of my eye towards you. Looking into this pupil, you will clearly see both yourself and me[2] at the same time. For those who live with a single heart can also see with a single eye, and in a single eye are seen.

But lest I should now go on longer than usual, farewell. Though I see that because of your great love for Marsilio you do not want me to say farewell so promptly, so that you may fare better. Do you indeed wish for a slightly longer letter as is usual for those who love from a distance? Then accept a greeting from a mutual friend of ours, with which you may fare better! That man of letters, Paolo Saxia, bids me greet you.

So now farewell indeed.

[2] ms ac me clare

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De perseverantia

On perseverance

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco Soderini: greetings.

Come tell me, my dearest Soderini: what am I to write? Shall I lavishly praise your ability, your conduct and your learning? Not at all. For in a matter which is plain to all there is no need of witnesses. Shall I, perhaps, first vehemently urge you to the most valuable study of civil law? Indeed no. For one who spurs on a man who is hurrying of his own accord, in my opinion does not instruct him, but obstructs him. I shall not, then,

press you to run faster, but rather beg you to keep going. Certainly, the reward of runners is not at the starting post but at the finishing line. Anyone can begin a race, even the laziest, but very few complete it. At the start, in the seed-time thorns and stones threaten you, in the middle the most delightful flowers smile at you, at the end the sweetest fruits are gathered. It is not the man who sows but the man who tends the crop and measures it out who is to be called a prosperous farmer. I think that before long our Soderini is truly going to be a prosperous farmer. For him the hard toil of the sowing and the worst of winter were over long ago. Springtime with its flowers is now far advanced, and fruitful summer is approaching its time. Take great care, then, of your health, so that you can feed most pleasantly upon the sweet fruits of your cultivating. Farewell.

But why do I write so briefly at present, to one whom I love so much? Because, even while we seem absent, we hold long conversations together day and night, by virtue of our mutual love. Besides, your Girolamo Amazzi—and because he is yours, he is therefore mine—the common bond of our goodwill, is starting out for the school at Pisa. He will give you a long account in person.

Once again, farewell.

128

Solus divinus medicus curare morbos animi potest

Only the divine physician is able to cure the ills of the soul

Marsilio Ficino to Francesco, the Cardinal of Siena: greetings.

LATELY, Venerable Father, I suffered great sorrow at the loss of a most excellent friend, and I could not be comforted even by Calliope with her lyre, who has often at other times been a sweet comforter to me in distress.

Minerva, too, mysteriously deserted me; for had she not awhile withdrawn her impenetrable shield the darts of unbending Saturn and fierce Mars[1] would never have wounded me so grievously. So there remained only Phoebus, the divine physician, who seemed able to cure the sickness of my soul.

But why all this? Because, Venerable Father, you divined my ill fortune, else you could not have known, and sent to your Marsilio a most timely letter, filled with love and kindness, in which you forbade me to thank you for the great favours I have received from you. To be more accurate, you have proffered me not a letter but the most wholesome and divine medicine of manna, nectar, and ambrosia. Whether this were a medicine or, more probably, a food, by it my soul was refreshed. It revived and breathed again, recovered its faculties and grew whole. And so, from now on, you are Phoebus for me, who alone brings peace to the soul, and of you will my lyre always sing. The followers of Democritus valued this peace[2] so highly that in it alone they considered lay divine as well as human happiness. This peace is usually least to be found in men who conduct great affairs; because the affairs are great and the men are small. But my Phoebus, a very haven of peace, is fitted for such affairs, and the highest await him, for it is in these that he is at his greatest.

129

Vicissitudo amoris unde nascitur

Whence the reciprocity of love is born

Marsilio Ficino to Amerigo Corsini: greetings.

That proverb, Corsini, 'If you want to be loved, then love'—from where principally do we think it derives its power? If we ask love himself the

reason for this proverb, he will perhaps reply that he is so free and so precious that neither does he wish, nor is he able, to be bought or sold at any price but that of himself. However, should we question anyone who is a true lover and friend, I think he will reply thus: Whoever loves passionately in some way takes himself from himself and gives himself up to his beloved, so the beloved, if he be right minded, cherishes the lover as his own. For everyone should hold dearest what belongs to him. The beloved also knows that if like is to be rendered for like, man must be given for man, and, of course, will for will.

Now the lover fashions in his mind the image of the one he loves, and so his mind becomes, as it were, a mirror in which the form of the beloved is reflected.[1] Since the beloved recognises himself in the lover, he is compelled to love him. But if we seek the truth of that proverb from nature, she will perhaps teach us this: likeness always begets love.[2] But likeness is a quality that is the same in more than one person, for if one man is like another the other is necessarily like him. And so the same likeness that compels one man to love another also leads the other to love him. For, as we experience every day, when two strings or lyres are tuned to the same pitch, whenever one is plucked the other vibrates.

If such teachers are not adequate or not clear enough, then let us turn to the philosophers, my Corsini, and hear to what they chiefly attribute the cause of this mutual emotion. Astrologers[3] consider there is mutual attraction between those at whose birth the sun and moon were in complementary positions; for instance, if at my birth the Sun was in Aries and the Moon in Sagittarius, and at your birth the Sun was in Sagittarius and the Moon in Aries. Such attraction also occurs in those born under the same sign or a similar one, and with the same planet or a similar one in the ascendant; or again if the benign planets make a similar aspect to the Ascendant or if Venus was placed in the same house and degree at birth.

Followers of Plato add that the same spirit[a] or a similar one guides the life of those men. Natural and moral philosophers believe this attraction is caused by similar temperament, upbringing, education, behaviour and way of thinking. Finally, where many causes coincide we find the mutual attraction much stronger. Where they all coincide, there springs again the love of Pythias and Damon, Pilades and Orestes.[4]

What more? A principle of this kind, Amerigo, a long time ago united

[a] daemon

Giovanni Cavalcanti and Marsilio Ficino in[1] divine love; happily the same principle now joins a third to us: Amerigo.[2] And what shall I say about Bernardo Bembo, the Venetian? Not only has this principle united him with us, but so has divine providence.

[1] ms iamdiu in divino
[2] ms quoque tertium feliciter

130

Vera poesis a Deo ad Deum

True poetry is from God and for God

Marsilio Ficino to Alessandro Braccesi, a priest of the Muses: greetings.

Our Plato, in the dialogue entitled *Ion*,[1] considers to be divine only those songs which the poets have filled with the music and frenzy of the Muses. When these are sung as human music, they rouse both singer and audience to frenzy.

Alessandro's songs that were sent to Marsilio yesterday were of this kind, as my lyre soon proved to many who heard them. A little later this was confirmed by our friend, Giovanni Battista Buoninsegni, the Greek and Latin scholar. Therefore, Braccesi, you owe your poetry not so much to your diligence, which is considerable, as to the inspiration of the Muses. And from now on, my friend, I beg you to forget mortal men and, since your song is God-inspired, to sing of God. For not only Moses and David but the other Hebrew prophets clearly warned us to do this by their religious songs, as also did Zoroaster, Linus, Orpheus, Museus, Moses, Empedocles, Parmenides, Heraclitus and Xenophanes. So besides did Pythagoras and Plato,[2] who banished Homer and Hesiod from the company of men to the Underworld, partly because they improperly ascribed divine qualities to men and partly because they impiously ascribed human qualities to the gods. Similarly, if you sing of men alone, as if

you were perhaps ungrateful to God, which heaven forbid, you will sing mostly of men who are ungrateful and dumb.[1] But as often as you sing of God (which I hope you will do), so often shall Echo sweetly and happily accompany your song.

Farewell.[2]

[1] ms plurimum, mutosque cantabis
[2] ms Echo. Vale.

131

Sua mittenda sunt ad suos

What is a man's own should be sent to his own

Marsilio Ficino to Piero Soderini, a man distinguished for his learning and his conduct: greetings.

I HAVE often wished, dearest Soderini, to send to those who have asked me for my letters the original itself; but my book has always objected with this vigorous complaint: 'Do not, I beg of you, send me where you are not, my father.' But when I told it to set out for Piero, it did not object at all, since, it seems, it understood that when it goes to Soderini it will not leave Marsilio. So, my book, go joyfully[1] to this man, without whom I[2] myself go nowhere.

Yet I see you now demand something for the journey. At present I can find nothing of greater value than the name of beloved 'Paolo Antonio', dearest brother of my Piero. So carry his sweet name with you for the journey. And as often as he happens to look at you in Piero's house, greet him in the name of Marsilio.

Farewell.[1]

[1] ms ergo feliciter ad
[2] ms quo nusquam

(The end of the first book)

Appendix I

The two following letters were omitted from the printed edition, but are found in most of the manuscripts. The texts are printed in *Supplementum Ficinianum* (II, p. 38, and pp. 46–47).

Homo non propter ingenium sed propter virtutem est laudandus

A man should be praised not for natural ability, but for virtue

Marsilio Ficino to Pontico Germano: greetings.

It is not you, Pontico, but rather God within you that I praise for the natural ability which you have in abundance. For that is a gift of God, and not your own. Not until you have lived well will I praise you. Those who are always fawning upon you do not love you; but I, because I respect you for your natural ability, urge you to curb your pride and passion. Unless you do so, the greater your ability the more degraded and wretched will you become.

Farewell.

Non est ad religionem quilibet admictendus

Men should not be admitted indiscriminately to holy orders

Marsilio Ficino to Leonardo of Perugia, the theologian: greetings.

Our pupil, through excessive love and zeal for the Muses, last Autumn fell into a morbid state of melancholy. Consequently, he asserted that he saw black phantoms by day and night, and that he was tormented by a great fear of hell. He added many other things which, as you may have heard, have happened before. Thus driven by anguish, he turned to the monks of St. Mark, and said that he wished to serve God according to their rule. But since he promised to bestow upon them his inherited possessions, the greedy men, wishing to ensnare the melancholy young man, more quickly than was fitting at once clad him in religious habit.

Foolish and corrupt rulers of religious orders do similar wrongs every day. Wrongdoing of this kind is as evil as religion is good. It concerns me, since I am a priest, a follower of Peter, to point out to you the faults of religious people; but it concerns you, since you are a leader of those people, to correct these faults, lest in future a similar fate befall young men being rashly brought to take their vows. But if the Brahmins and Pythagoreans used to admit no-one at all to their human teaching unless examined and proved for two years, why is anyone at all admitted so rashly to the divine teaching? For this very reason religion is held in contempt by many; because, since people are accepted indiscriminately, there are huge numbers of men in holy orders, some of whom are corrupt, some ignorant and some mad. God, however, demands from men that which is of greatest worth.

Appendix II

The following was published as a preface to the twelve books of letters in 1495. It also appears as a letter in the twelth book of letters (*Opera Omnia* I, p. 954) dated 15th December, 1493.

Marsilio Ficino, the Florentine, to all his letters at the same time: greetings.

My letters: each time at my behest[1] you greet my friends you will[2] also offer up immortal greetings to our[3] dearest friend Girolamo Rossi. For I had fathered you mortal; soon to die by what fate I know not. But Girolamo, a man noted for his piety, has recently caused you to be born again, I hope to immortal life. For you lay hidden a long while, yearning for the light, nor until now was there anyone to pluck you from the shadows; since perhaps this was not yet the will of Destiny or Deity. But our Rossi—indeed your Roscius[1] now[4]—with that devotion which he has always shown your father Marsilio, has now with the same inherited love[5] happily pursued you too, working diligently so that your long-hidden faces may be wholly revealed. Therefore greet this learned and pious man who has restored you, you who were hitherto sorrowful but are now glad; and for the prodigious gift of immortality give immortal thanks.

15th December, 1494.
Florence.

[1] ms (me iubere) salutem
[2] ms salutes dicetis. Vos
[3] ms amicissimo nostro Hieronymo
[4] ms imo iam vester Roscius
[5] ms vos charitate haereditaria

Notes on the Letters

Preface

1 Plato, *Epistles*, VI, D.

1

1 The *Philebus*, one of the ten dialogues of Plato which Cosimo asked Ficino to translate in 1463. The illuminated manuscript (*Canonicianus Latinus* 163) of the ten dialogues is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

2

1 The substance of this letter is drawn from Plato's *Euthydemus*, 278E–282.

2 A pun on the Greek word for the Graces, χάριτες, and γῆ, meaning 'land'. In its original form, this letter is dated 'Celli, III Idiis Ianuariis. 1463' (*cf.* Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1, p. 37).

3

1 See letter 86, note 1.

4

1 The style of this dialogue is inspired by St. Augustine's *Soliloquies* and refers to a period in Ficino's life when he experienced 'a bitterness of spirit', *spiritus amaritudine distractus*. See Corsi VIII: Marcel, p. 683.

The passage beginning 'Your father is not of a physical nature . . .' was inserted later, as the early manuscripts show. It is similar to one in St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII, 3–5, which treats of the search for God by the intellect. Both it and other parts of the dialogue are also found in the *Platonic Theology* of Ficino (Book IX, iii, 14, and Book X, viii, ed. Marcel, p. 88).

5

1 A fever which recurred every other day. According to Plato it was caused by an excess of water in the system. See Plato, *Timaeus*, 86.

2 The source for the doctrine of *spiritus* as a substance which linked body and soul is Plato's *Timaeus*, 43A. Ficino describes the *spiritus* at length in his work on medicine and astrology, *De vita libri tres Opera Omnia* I, 493. In *De Amore* he defines it as 'a kind of very thin and clear vapour created through the heat of the heart from the purest part of the blood, and diffused through all the parts.' (*De Amore*, oratio sexta, vi, ed. Marcel, p. 207). See D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London, 1958); and C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge, 1964), 165–9.

6

1 See Plato, *Laws*, I, 624 (the opening paragraph E). See also Plato, *Minos*.

2 See Plato, *Protagoras*, 320D *seq.* for the myth of Prometheus.

7

1 Plato, *Ion*, 533D–536, *Phaedrus*, 245. For Democritus, see Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, xlvi, 194. *De Divinatione*, I, xxxvii, 80.

2 *Phaedrus*, 250.

3 Hermes Trismegistus, *Pimander*, I, 6–8.

4 In the *Republic*, V, 476 *seq.*, Plato describes ideas as the unchanging forms of justice, goodness, beauty, *etc.*, of which the manifestations we perceive are shadows. They alone are the objects of real knowledge. See also Plato, *Timaeus*, 28, *seq.* The substance of this letter is drawn from Plato's *Phaedrus*, 244–56, and *Phaedo*, 81–3, 66–8.

5 *Phaedrus*, 247.

6 *Phaedo*, 66–8, 82.

7 *Phaedrus*, 249.

8 *Phaedrus*, 244–5.

9 This Dionysius was, in the 15th century, wrongly believed to be St. Paul's Athenian convert (Acts 17:34). He was in fact a Christian Neoplatonist of the 5th century A.D., whose writings were much studied by Christian theologians.

10 St. Paul, Romans 1:20; Dionysius 'the Areopagite', *The Divine Names*, IV, 4.

11 *Phaedrus*, 250.

12 For this and the following passage see *Phaedrus*, 251–6, and *Phaedo*, 81–3.

13 Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, 734: '*Clausae tenebris et carcere caeco*'.

14 *Phaedrus*, 245.

15 *Ion*, 534.

16 According to Macrobius the Muses are the song of the universe. The Etruscan name for them,' Camenae', a form of 'Canenae', is derived from *canere*, 'to sing'. (Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis*, II, iii, 4, ed. and trans. Stahl, New York, 1952, p. 194.)

17 *Republic*, X, 617.

18 Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis*, II, iii, 1, ed. Stahl, p. 193.

19 Quoted from Macrobius (*supra*). See Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae*, XXXI; Proclus, ed. Diehl, 203E; Plutarch, *De Procreatione Animi in Timaeo*, XXXII, 1029C.
20 Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, 724–7.
21 Virgil, *Eclogues*, III, 60.
22 From the Orphic theogony, quoted also by Plato, *Laws*, IV, 715E—'God, as the old tradition declares, holding in his hand the beginning, middle and end of all that is . . .' see Abel, *Orphica*, p. 167, verse 46. Quoted also in Eusebius, *De Praep. Evang.*, III, 9.
23 *Phaedrus*, 265. In *De Amore*, Ficino describes the four kinds of divine frenzy as means by which God draws the soul back to unity and to Himself (*De Amore*, Oratio Septima, xiii, 257, xiv, 258, ed. Marcel).

9

1 Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I, 129.
2 Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 120–125.
3 Plato, *Laws*, XI, 927.

11

1 Plato, *Republic*, VII, 524E; and see Plato, *Parmenides*, 'On the nature of the one'.
2 Plato, *Epistles*, VII, 341D.

13

1 See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 249–56.
2 '*Philodoxi*': Plato, *Republic*, V, 479 (ed. Cornford). They 'set their affections on the objects of belief'; as opposed to philosophers, 'whose affections are set, in every case, on the objects of reality'.
3 Plotinus (204–270 A.D.), the founder of 'Neoplatonism', described the fundamental ideas of his philosophy in the *Enneads* (translated by Ficino into Latin) in which he treats of the immortality of the soul.
4 Porphyry (233–305 A.D.) studied under Plotinus, interpreted his works and wrote his life.
5 The Syrian Iamblichus (died *c.* 330 A.D.). In his writings Neoplatonism was further developed.
6 Proclus continued the development of Neoplatonism in his *Platonic Theology* and the *Elements of Theology*, which were both much studied in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. (Ficino borrowed Proclus's title for his own work on the immortality of the soul, and also many of his views on mythology.)
7 Plato, *Epistles*, II, 314. Dionysius was King of Syracuse. Plato corresponded with him and visited his court.

15

1 See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book III, 407 *seq.* Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection in water, not realising it to be himself. He died through grief because he could not lay hold of himself. In *De Amore*, Ficino describes how Narcissus, that is the soul of man, is so seduced by bodily beauty, which is only its shadow reflected in

water, that it deserts its own body and so dies (*De Amore*, Oratio Sexta, xvii, ed. Marcel, p. 235).

2 See *Republic*, X, 611C.

3 See letter 7, note 4.

16

1 Aristippus: founder of the Cyrenaic school of philosophy, which made pleasure the highest good. For a time he was a disciple of Socrates.

2 Lucretius, in his poem *De Rerum Natura*, also accords an important place to pleasure.

18

1 Phoebus Apollo: the god of the arts.

2 Mercury: the god (identified with the Greek Hermes) who invented language and speech, and who presides over orators. See Plato, *Cratylus*, 408.

19

1 For the four civil virtues (which later became the cardinal virtues), see Plato, *Republic*, IV, 427E. See also Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 2, 'the virtues', p. 30, trans. Stephen Mackenna; Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis*, I, viii, 5; Porphyry, *Sententiae*, XXXII, 2–4; also Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, XIV, vi, ed. Marcel, p. 268. The virtues referred to are Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude and Justice; they exist on the four levels mentioned in the letter. On the lowest level they have a literal meaning. On the purgatorial level Prudence means 'to contemplate divine matters with contempt of all that the world contains'; Temperance, 'to renounce as far as nature permits, all things that the body requires'; Fortitude, 'that the soul should not be terrified when she recedes in a manner from the body'; and Justice, 'to accept the practice of all the virtues as the only road to the good'. On the third level Prudence means no longer to prefer divine things but to take no account of any others. Temperance means wholly to forget earthly desires; Fortitude, to be ignorant of the very existence of the passions; Justice, 'to be so linked with that higher and divine mind that one keeps an inviolable pact with her by imitation of her'. The fourth level is 'to dwell with the "ideas" of the four virtues in the Divine Mind'. Macrobius, quoted from C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, iv, 68.

21

1 References to Works listed in this letter are:

Iamblici Calcidei Libri de Pythagorica Secta, mss Vat. Lat. 5953, 4530, in Vatican library.

Theonis Smyrnei de Locis Mathematicis, mss Vat. Lat. 4530, and Cod. philol., 305, Hamburg Univ. Library.

Speusippus, *De Definitionibus Platonis*, Ficino, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. II, 1962.

Alcinous, *De Doctrina Platonis*, Op. II, 1945.

Xenocratis de Morte Liber, Op. II, 1965.

Pythagorae Aurea Verba et Symbola, Op. II, 1978.

Mercurii Trismegisti Pymander de Potestate ac Sapientia Dei, Op. II, 1836.

Platonis Opera. First edition, Florence, 1484.

Commentaria in Phaedrum, Op. II, 1363.
In Philebum, Op. II, 1207.
De Amore, Op. II, 1320.
Compendio degli Opinione delle Philosophi circa Dio et Anima, to *Supplementum Ficinianum* II, XLIII, p. 128.
De Voluptate. December, 1457. Op. I, 987.
De Quattuor Sectis Philosophorum, to Clemente Fortini. 1457–8. *Sup. Fic.* II, XXVIII, p. 7.
De Virtutibus Moralibus seu de Magnificentia, to Antonio Canigiani. 1st June, 1457. *Sup. Fic.* II, XXVII, p. 1.
De Foelicitate. See letter 115. Op. I, 662.
De Justitia. See letter 95. Op. I, 652.
De Furore Divino. See letter 7. Op. I, 612.
Epistola Consolatoria a suoi Propinqui, *Sup. Fic.* II, XLV, p. 162.
Epistola dell' Appetito a Leonardo di Tone Pagni. March, 1460. *Sup. Fic.* II, XLIV, p. 158.
Oratio ad Deum Theologica. See letter 116. Op. I, 665.
Dialogus inter Deum et Animam Theologicus. See letter 4. Op. I, 609.
Theologia Platonica sive de Immortalitate Animorum, Op. I, 79, *seq.*; also ed. Marcel in three vols. with French trans., 1964–70.
De Christiana Religione, Op. I, 1.
Disputatio contra Iudicium Astrologorum, Op. I, 781. *Sup. Fic.* II, XXIX.
De Raptu Paoli, Op. I, 697.
De Lumine, Op. I, 976.
Compendium Platonicae Theologiae, Op. I, 690.
Vita Platonis, Op. I, 763.
Quinque Quaestiones de Mente, Op. I, 675.
Epistole Philosophiche: this refers to the first book of letters.

The following, also listed in letter 21, are lost: *Commentary on the Gospels; The Physics and Elements of Theology*, of Proclus; *Physiognomy; Economics; The Principles of Platonic Discipline*.

The list is not complete as it names only major works written before 1475. (For a complete list of Ficino's works, see Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*.)

22

1 Knowledge and thinking are concerned with 'true being', while 'opinion' and 'imagining' constitute the apprehension of appearance in the world of becoming. See Plato, *Republic*, VII, 534A.
2 See Plato, *Apology*, 20E–21A.
3 St. Luke 9:62.
4 Genesis 19:26.

24

1 Ficino was ordained a priest on 13th January, 1473, and was given by Lorenzo the parish church of San Cristoforo at Novoli, near Florence.

2 An early ms (Laur. 90, Supp. 40) adds: *Salutat te Alexander Filicarius tuus, vir quantum probus, tantum nobis charus, ergo charissimus.*

25

1 Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI, 4. See also Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, XIV, v, ed. Marcel, p. 261.

26

1 'The University of Pisa' in the Italian ms.

27

1 Hero: see note to letter 31.
2 See St. Luke 2:32.
3 The Latin word '*gratia*' carries the meaning of 'thanks' or 'gratitude', as well as 'grace'.
4 *Aglaia* (Splendour), *Euphrosyne* (Joy), *Thalia* (Vigour); see Abel, *Orphica, Orphei hymni*, LX, 90; Ficino, *De Amore*, Oratio Quinta, ii, ed. Marcel, p. 181; and the *Hymns of Orpheus*, tr. Thomas Taylor, LIX, 'to the Graces' (p. 268, op. cit.).

28

1 A saying, of unknown origin, quoted in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 5.
2 μηδὲν ἄγαν (nothing to excess). See Terence, *The Lady of Andros*, 60. One of two famous inscriptions in the temple of Apollo at Delphi; the other being translated as 'Know thyself'. See Plato, *Protagoras*, 343B, and letter 110.
3 Achilles wounded Telephus, whose wound festered until Achilles scraped rust from his spear into it. See Apollodorus, *Epitome*, III, 20.

31

1 See Plato, *Cratylus*, 398, where Socrates says heroes were 'demigods' who sprang either from the love of a god for a mortal woman, or of a mortal man for a goddess. They occupied an intermediate position between '*daimones*', divine spirits, and mortal men.

34

1 Ficino's favourite wine was the white 'Trebbiano' of the Val d'Arno, according to Piero Vettori; see Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, p. 726.

37

1 Stesichorus, a poet of Himera in Sicily (*c.* 600 B.C.) wrote on the Trojan wars.
2 See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 242–3.

38

1 In ancient times lucky days were marked with white stones and unlucky ones with black. In trials at law a white stone was cast as a vote for acquittal, and a black stone for condemnation (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV, 41).

39

1 See Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, IX, i–v, ed. Marcel, vol. II.

40

1 In his commentary on the third book of Aristotle's *De Anima*, Averroes maintained that the intellect is only one for all men, and exists outside individual human souls; and that the latter merely participate momentarily through their thinking faculties in this universal intellect. In asserting the immortality of this universal intellect, Averroes removed the basis for the immortality of individual human souls which were outside it, and merely had a temporary connection with it. Averroes' doctrine had a widespread influence in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. Ficino in the fifteenth book of the *Platonic Theology* sets forth a series of arguments against this doctrine. See Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man*, ii, p. 30, 'The Immortality of the Soul'.

2 See Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, XV, i, and xiii, xiv, xix, ed. Marcel, vol. III.

41

1 Plato, *Republic*, 488.

42

1 Plato, *Parmenides*, 140, *seq.*; and Plato, *Epinomis*, 991E–992A (Loeb, p. 485).

2 Ficino, *De Amore*, Oratio Quinta, iv, ed. Marcel, p. 184.

3 For this image of love see Plato, *Phaedrus*, 255.

4 See Plato, *Laws*, VIII, 837C. See also Plato, *Republic*, III, 403, and see letter 47, note 2.

43

1 Timaeus of Locris, who wrote *De Anima Mundi*, a treatise on the nature of the world soul.

2 See Aristotle, *Physics*, II. 3. 194, 7. 198a, where four causes are enumerated: *efficiens*, *finis*, *materia* and *forma*. And see Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, V, v, ed. Marcel, p. 181.

3 Plato, *Timaeus*, 28.

4 Plato, *Timaeus*, 29.

5 Plato, *Timaeus*, 30–1.

45

1 A friend of Aeneas, renowned for his faithfulness. See Virgil, *Aeneid*.

46

1 Carneades of Cyrene (*c.* 213 B.C.), founder of the New Academy in Athens, in opposition to the Stoics. The style of Carneades was to argue against every statement put forward. He would sometimes even confute all the arguments advanced in his own speech. See Cicero, *De Oratore*, III, xxi, 80.

2 Lycurgus, the famous lawgiver of Sparta, promoted concord and order by his laws, which are said to have lasted for 700 years. See Plutarch, *In Vita*.
3 Herodotus, I, 65–6.

47

1 Ficino, *De Amore*, Oratio Prima, iv, *De Utilitate Amoris*, ed. Marcel, pp. 141–2.
2 Plato, *Symposium*, 206. Also see Plato, *Republic*, III, 402D. Ficino says in *De Amore*, 'When we speak of love we mean the desire for beauty . . . There is a triple beauty: beauty of the soul, beauty of the body and beauty of sound. That of the soul is perceived by the mind, that of the body by the eyes, and that of sound by the ears alone. Since therefore mind, sight and hearing are the only means by which we can enjoy beauty, and since love is the desire to enjoy beauty, love is always satisfied with the mind, the eyes and the ears. What need is there of the senses of smell, taste and touch?' (*Oratio Prima*, iv, ed. Marcel, p. 142.) And again, 'Of those six faculties of the soul, three belong to body and matter, that is touch, taste and smell; but the other three, reason, sight and hearing, pertain to the soul. Therefore the first three, inclining more to the body, are more akin to it than to the soul . . . But the three higher senses, most removed from the material, are much more closely related to the soul.' (*Oratio Quinta*, ii, ed. Marcel, p. 179.)

49

1 'Many-footed'; from the Greek, *πολύπους*.

50

1 Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176AB. See also Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, XIV, ii, ed. Marcel, p. 251.
2 This letter is dated 1472, in ms Cod. Vindob. lat. 12466, Vienna, National Bibliothek (cf. Kristeller, *Sup. Fic. I, XCI*).

51

1 Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176B.
2 Plato, *Republic*, VII, 519A.
3 *Republic*, VI, 508.
4 St. John 14:6.
5 This essay on friendship is repeated in the preface to Ficino's translation of Alcinous, *De Doctrina Platonis* (*Opera*, II, 1945), also dedicated to Cavalcanti.

52

1 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244, *seq.*; Plato, *Ion*, 533–4.
2 Ovid, *Fasti*, VI, 5–6: '*Est Deus in nobis agitante calescimus illo impetus ille Sacrae semina mentis habet*'. This text is also repeated in Ficino's *Platonic Theology*, XIII, ii; *De poetis*, II, ed. Marcel, p. 203.

53

1 Plato, *Laws*, IV, 717; *Crito*, 51.

57

1 Greek philosopher of the 5th century B.C. Some of his doctrines, including that of atoms, and pleasure (i.e. tranquillity of the soul) as the supreme good, influenced Epicurus. In ancient times he was known as 'the laughing philosopher'.

2 Heraclitus was a 5th century B.C. philosopher of Ephesus. Maintaining that 'everything is and is not', he held that fire embodied most perfectly the principle of 'becoming', and thus the harmony of the universe. The soul approached most nearly to perfection when most like the fiery vapour out of which it was created and to which it will return. Thus 'while we live our souls are dead in us, but when we die our souls are restored to life'.

He was known as the 'dark' or 'weeping' philosopher in ancient times from the lonely life he led, as well as from the nature of his philosophy.

Artists in the Renaissance often juxtaposed the two philosophers (see E. Wind, 'The Christian Democritus', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, II, 1938–9).

58

1 See letter 57, notes 1 and 2.

60

1 A reference to Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*.

63

1 Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, XIII, ii. Vol. II, ed. Marcel, p. 218.

65

1 Calliope was the eldest of the Muses and goddess of epic poetry. To Calliope report is made 'of those who spend their time in philosophy'. See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 259D. Ficino much admired Angelo Poliziano's translation of Homer. (See letter 17.)

2 See the words of Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium*, who declares that 'the lover may swear and forswear himself . . . and the gods will forgive his transgression, for there is no such thing as a lover's oath.' Plato, *Symposium*, 183B.

67

1 See note on Luca d'Antonio de' Bernardi.

68

1 Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, XVII, 75–7.

2 1 Corinthians 2:11.
3 The reference is to Job 5:13.
4 1 Corinthians 3:19–20.

70

1 In Latin *humus* means 'earth' or 'soil'.

71

1 Thalia was the Muse of pastoral and lyric verse.

72

1 The Medici villa of 'Cafaggiuolo' in the region of Mugello, built for Cosimo de' Medici in 1451.

73

1 Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, XXX, 167–8.
2 Plato, *Republic*, V, 462, *seq.*

76

1 The third of the holy orders is that of deacon.
2 See Plato, *Alcibiades*, I, 130, *seq.* And for Plato's method of cross-examination, Plato, *Laches*, 187E–188.
3 A celebrated physiognomist; Cicero, *De Fato*, V, 10; *Tusculan Disputations*, IV, xxxvii, 80.

78

1 Plato, *Republic*, V, 462. See also for this and following paragraph, Plato, *Laws*, X, 903B, and *Laws*, IV, 716C–718. Shortly before Lorenzo's death he gave this advice to his son Piero: 'Consult the interests of the whole community rather than the gratification of a part.' From a letter of Poliziano to Jacopo Antiquario, quoted in Roscoe's *Life of Lorenzo de' Medici*, p. 328.

80

1 Plato, *Phaedo*, 118A; the last words of Socrates before his death were 'I owe a cock to Aesculapius.'
2 The following addition is given in an early ms (Laur. 90, Supp. 40): *Florentiae. Saluta Ioannem Marcum, virum certe egregium, nobilemque charissimum.*

81

1 Homer, *Iliad*, XI, 514.
2 Greek god of medicine, son of Apollo and the nymph Coronis. Homer mentions him as a skilful physician whose sons, Machaon and Podalirius, are the physicians in the

Greek camp before Troy. Aesculapius was said to have learnt the art of healing as well as hunting from the Centaur Chiron. See Homer, *Iliad*, IV, 193.

3 Hippocrates, *Works*, Vol. IX, ed. Littré, p. 325, Paris, 1839.

4 *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 339.

5 See Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, XV, 64, and Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, sec. 30.

6 This refers to Mithridates VII, King of Pontus, surnamed 'the Great', whose skill in medicine is attested by ancient authors; Appian, Strabo, Justin, etc.

7 An Arabian medical writer, also known as John of Damascus, who lived in the first half of the 9th century. His collected works were printed in Venice in 1497. (See Jöchers, *Lexicon*, IV, p. 1547.

8 Saints who were brothers and physicians in Cilicia. Martyred in 303 A.D.

9 Hippocrates, *Works*, *op. cit. supra*, Vol. IX, p. 325.

10 *Galeni Opera*, Vol. XI, *ad Glauconem*, 11, IV, f, 97 (ed. Kuhn, 1826).

11 Hippocrates, *Works*, *op. cit. supra*, Vol. IX, p. 387.

12 Plato, *Timaeus*, 89.

82

1 Virgil, *Eclogues*, IV, 2.

86

1 The first paragraph of this letter is markedly similar to the second of letter 3.

2 Plato, *Parmenides*.

3 Plato, *Philebus*.

4 See Ficino's preface to Xenocrates, *De Morte* (*Opera Omnia*, II, 1965), where he describes Cosimo's last hours.

88

1 Ficino dedicated his book on the Christian Religion (*De Christiana Religione*) to Lorenzo de' Medici, after being ordained a priest and receiving the benefice of San Cristoforo at Novoli in 1473 (see letter 24).

92

1 Abel, *Orphica*, hymn XXXIV, to Apollo, *op. cit.*, p. 76; and *The Orphic Hymns*, tr. Thomas Taylor, XXXIII, to Apollo, *op. cit.*, pp. 246–8; and see his footnote about the lyre of Apollo being an image of celestial harmony.

2 See Plato, *Timaeus*, 87C–88, and also 35B–36C, for the ratios of the tetrachord which according to Plutarch represent the harmony of the four elements in the soul. Plutarch, *De Musica*, 1138D–1139B, *Moralia*, Loeb Vol. XIV, pp. 399–403.

3 See Aristotle, *Politics*, VIII, 7, for purification by music.

4 Plato, *Republic*, III, 401E–402.

5 1 Samuel 16:14–16 and 23.

6 Fantasy (*phantasia*) was distinguished from imagination (*imaginatio*) in that the latter signified the retention of images whereas the former dealt with them by 'separating

and putting together'. (Albertus Magnus, quoted in C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, p. 163).

7 One such story of Pythagoras is told in Quintilian, *Institutiones*, I, x, 31–3.

8 Arion was a lyric poet from Lesbos who lived in the 7th century B.C. In legend he escaped from sailors who meant to murder him by jumping overboard, and getting to shore on the back of a dolphin which had been attracted by his playing on the lyre (Herodotus I, c. 23, 24). Amphion in mythology was a son of Jupiter, who was said to have raised the walls of Thebes with the sound of his lyre. (Homer, *Odyssey* 11.)

9 See Hermes Trismegistus, *Pimander*, I, 16–19.

10 Aristoxenus, a Pythagorean philosopher and musician, who wrote on the principles of harmony. See Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* I, x, 19, and Quintilian, *Institutiones*, I, x, 22.

11 Plato, *Alcibiades*, 108C.

12 Plato would only have allowed the Dorian and Phrygian modes to be played to the Guardians of his Republic—'which will best express the accents of courage in the face of stern necessity and misfortune, and of temperance in prosperity'. (Plato, *Republic*, III, 399, trans. Cornford.)

95

1 See Plato, *Laws*, IV, 716A.

2 See Plato, *Laws*, X, 903B, for the idea that man is created for the sake of the whole.

3 See Plato, *Republic*, V, 462, for the idea of the state as a single being.

4 See Plato, *Laws*, IV, 715.

5 See Plato, *Laws*, IV, 715.

6 Seneca, *Thyestes*, 607–12.

7 Goddess of Justice, who lived on earth during the Golden Age but, disgusted by the wickedness of men, fled to heaven during the Bronze Age and was placed amongst the constellations as Virgo. She is represented as a virgin holding a scale in one hand, a sword in the other. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 150; Seneca, *Octavia*, 424.

96

1 Plato, *Timaeus*, 34E; *Laws*, X, 892A.

98

1 In *De Amore* Ficino enumerates seven gifts of God given to Man by the souls of the planets; thus from Jupiter we receive the power of ruling, and from the sun clarity of perception, etc. (*De Amore*, Oratio Sexta, iv, ed. Marcel, p. 204).

100

1 Isaiah 28:11. Ficino was referring to contemporary Aristotelians who were interpreting his thought mainly through the translations of Arabic commentators, notably Averroes. See Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, p. 594.

2 See Plato, *Republic*, VI, 495E–496.

101

1 The Cynics followed Antisthenes, a disciple of Socrates, in believing that the wise man looks with contempt on the pleasures of life and lives without regard for money.

103

1 Niccolo Michelozzi.

105

1 Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, XVIII, 83; Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, sec. 42.
2 For a description of how the soul receives lasting impressions, see Plato, *Theaetetus*, 194C.
3 See Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, lxxxvi, 353–4 *seq.* Simonides of Ceos (556–468 B.C.), the lyric poet, was said to have invented mnemonics.
4 In its original form, this letter was dated '*Idibus Augustiis* 1458'. See Kristeller, *Sup. Fic.* I, 39.

106

1 See Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, VIII, iii, I, ed. Marcel, p. 296; also *De Amore*, Oratio Sexta, XVIII, ed. Marcel, p. 237. In Plato, definitions of virtue are found in *Republic*, IV, 427E–433, *Laws*, I, 631–2, *Phaedo*, 69BC.
2 For a distinction between the reflective and moral virtues, see Aristotle, *Ethics*, II, i. See *Republic*, VII, 518E.
3 The freedom to choose between good and evil; see *Republic*, X, 617E–618.

107

1 Ficino writes in the prologue to *De Amore* (ed. Marcel, p. 136): 'Plato died at the age of 81 at a banquet on the 7th November, his birthday. This banquet, which commemorated both his birthday and the anniversary of his death, was renewed every year by all the first followers of Plato down to the time of Plotinus and Porphyry. But for twelve hundred years after Porphyry, these solemn feasts ceased to be celebrated, until in our time Lorenzo de' Medici, wishing to restore the Platonic Symposium, appointed Francesco Bandini as master of the feast (*archytriclinum*).'
2 The feast at Careggi was held on 7th November, 1468. Ficino wrote his commentary on the *Symposium* between November, 1468 and July, 1469.
3 See Plato, *Timaeus*, 34B, 36E, *seq.*, describing the creation of the soul.
4 'Like Janus having two faces' in the Italian manuscript.

108

1 Plato, *Gorgias*, 527E.

109

1 See Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, XVII, 71–2.
2 Apollonius of Alabanda: a Greek orator, who discouraged anyone from attending his school whom he considered unsuited to be an orator. See Cicero, *De Oratore*, I, xxviii, 126.

110

1 See letter 28, note 2.
2 Pythagoras: *Golden Verses* (*Aurea Verba*, Ficino, *Opera Omnia*, II, p. 1978.)
3 Psalm 8:5.
4 Psalm 82:6.
5 This passage is also quoted in Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, VI, ii. i, ed. Marcel, p. 227.

111

1 The *Platonic Theology on the Immortality of Souls*, written between 1469 and 1474.
2 This is the opening paragraph of Ficino's *Platonic Theology*, I, i. i, ed. Marcel, p. 38.

113

1 'Pulci' means 'flea' in Italian. In the printed edition Pulci's name was omitted from this letter and the following one. Ficino's was similarly omitted from the later editions of *Morgante*. See note on Bernardo Pulci.

114

1 The jester condemned to put on the form of a monkey in the underworld for ridiculing his fellow-men. Homer, *Iliad*, and see Plato, *Republic*, X, 620C.

115

1 The *Altercazione* of Lorenzo de' Medici (*Opere Volgari*, Vol. III, *Scritti Spirituali*, ed. Rizzoli, 1958).
2 For a classification of 'good' in Plato, see *Laws*, I, 631; and in Aristotle, *Ethics*, I, viii. See also Plato, *Euthydemus*, 279.
3 Aristotle, *Ethics*, I, 13. Aristotle, *Ethics*, X, 7–8.
4 See Cicero, *De Finibus*, III, viii *seq.* (Loeb, p. 245) for Stoic and Epicurean definitions of the 'good'.
5 To Epicurus and his school, pleasure was the highest good. The test of true pleasure was the removal and absorption of all that gives pain to the body or trouble to the mind. Virtue he valued, as it led to the health of the body and tranquillity of the mind.
6 Cicero, *De Finibus*, V, 23.
7 Aristotle, *Ethics*, X, 7–8.
8 See Plato, *Phaedo*, 67, and *Phaedrus*, 247D.
9 Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, XVIII, viii (3–8), ed. Marcel, pp. 209–20.

10 *Phaedrus*, 247D.
11 *De Voluptate:* Ficino, *Opera*, I, p. 986.
12 *Phaedrus*, 247A.
13 Ficino, *De Amore* and the *Platonic Theology*, XVIII, ix, ed. Marcel, pp. 220–6.

116

1 The *Oratio* was translated into Italian verse by Lorenzo in chapter 6 of the spiritual poem, *L'altercazione* (op. cit.). See letter 115. Compare this *Oratio* with the theological prayers at the beginning of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*, I (translated in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, edited J. Burleigh, Library of Christian Classics, Vol. VI, London).

117

1 Piero Riario, Cardinal of Pisa.

119

1 The *Disputationes Camaldulenses* of Landino describe a 'tournament' between the Aristotelian and Platonic schools which took place in the summer of 1468 in the Camaldoli near Florence. Lorenzo de' Medici and Leon Battista Alberti took leading parts, as did Ficino and Landino. The first book describes a debate on the active and contemplative life, the second is on the highest good, and the third and fourth books treat of Platonic allegory in Virgil and Dante.

123

1 The first sentences of this paragraph are Cicero's own words in praise of philosophy. See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, V, ii, 5. Loeb p. 429.
2 See Plato, *Cratylus*, and Varro, *De Lingua Latina.*
3 A technique of philosophic conversation carried on by means of question and answer which seeks to elicit 'an account of the essence of each thing'. See Plato, *Republic*, VII, 534; and Plato, *Philebus*, 58 *seq.*
4 'and theology' in the Italian manuscript.
5 Quoted from Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, XIII, iii, ed. Marcel, p. 11, p. 226.
6 This essay appears to have been written about the beginning of 1476, to judge from a letter to Francesco Gazolti in Book IV of Ficino's *Epistolae* (*Opera Omnia* I, 761).

124

1 During a year of Jubilee, plenary indulgence was obtainable by the faithful on the condition of their confessing their sins and visiting certain churches a stated number of times, or doing an equivalent amount of meritorious work. In 1470 the interval between Jubilees was fixed at 25 years. 'Extraordinary' Jubilees could, however, be appointed by the Pope.

126

1 Respectively, the rivers of sorrow, hate, lamentation and fire in the underworld (Plato, *Phaedo*, 113).
2 Ficino refers to his book, *De Christiana Religione*.

128

1 Certain qualities of the planetary gods are discussed by Ficino in *De Amore* (Oratio Quinta, VIII, p. 192, cap. 197, ed. Marcel). Saturn in his negative aspect represents melancholy; Mars in his represents malignance, bad temper, anger.
2 See letter 57, note 1, and letter 115, note 5. See also Cicero, *De Finibus*, V, viii, 23.

129

1 See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 255.
2 See Plato *Lysis*, 214; and Ficino, *De Amore*, Oratio Secunda, VIII, ed. Marcel, p. 158.
3 Astrology in the Middle Ages was closely linked with astronomy and medicine. See Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man*, p. 138.
4 Pythias (or Phintias), a Pythagorean, condemned to death by Dionysius of Syracuse, begged a period of liberty to arrange his affairs. Damon pledged his life for the return of his friend and Pythias returned before the day appointed for his execution. Dionysius, impressed by their friendship, then released both. See Diodorus Siculus, X, 4; also Plutarch, *Pericles*; and Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, XXXI, 189 *seq.*, and XXXIII, 234 *seq.*

Pilades was the faithful friend of Orestes, son of Agamemnon. See especially Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris*.

130

1 See Plato, *Ion*, 534.
2 See Plato, *Republic*, III, 390–392A.

131

1 In the Riccardiana manuscript this letter is in the third book of Ficino's letters (*Opera Omnia* I, 736. 2). It was written towards the end of December, 1476.

Appendix II

1 Roscius Amerinus was falsely accused of murdering his father and was successfully defended by Cicero, who showed that he was a model of filial devotion. Cicero, *Pro Roscio Amerino*.

Notes on Ficino's Correspondents

and other Contemporaries mentioned in this volume

Full details of the relevant major works referred to in these notes are given in the bibliography (pp. 235–236). The following abbreviations used in the notes are here given in full:
Diz. Biog. Ital.—*Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani.*
Marcel—*Marsile Ficin* (R. Marcel).
Sup. Fic.—*Supplementum Ficinianum* (P. O. Kristeller).
Vespasiano—*Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century* (Vespasiano da Bisticci).

Donato Acciaiuoli (1429–1478): famous orator and Aristotelian philosopher; a member of the 'Chorus Academiae Florentinae' (an Aristotelian school). He held many public offices in the Republic and was ambassador to Milan in 1478. He delivered the funeral oration on the death of Cosimo de' Medici.

Della Torre, pp. 322–425; Cosenza, pp. 23–31; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. I, pp. 80–2.

Benedetto Accolti of Arezzo (1415–1464): lawyer, man of letters and member of Ficino's Academy. He was Chancellor of Florence during the last seven years of his life, succeeding Poggio Bracciolini to that office. He wrote a work on the most outstanding men of his times, *De praestantia virorum sui aevi.*

Vespasiano, pp. 370–2; Marcel, p. 216; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. I, pp. 99–101.

Antonio degli Agli (1399–1477): son of Bellincione. He became a Canon in 1429, later tutor to Pope Paul II, Bishop of Fiesole in 1466, and Bishop of Volterra in 1470. He was a member of the Platonic Academy and one of the speakers (Pausanias) in the Symposium described by Ficino in *De Amore.*

Vespasiano, pp. 179–80; Della Torre, pp. 775–6; Sup. Fic. II, p. 335; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. I, pp. 400–1.

Peregrino Agli (1440–1469): poet and humanist. At the age of 15 he was already writing poetry that was admired by men of learning. A member of Ficino's Academy; his teacher was Francesco da Castiglione.

F. Flamini, *Peregrino Allio Umanista poeta e confilosofo del Ficino*, Pisa, 1893; Della Torre, pp. 552–3; Sup. Fic. II, p. 322; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. I, pp. 401–2.

Girolamo Amazzi: physician and member of Ficino's Academy.

Della Torre, p. 779; Cosenza, p. 158.

Riccardo Angiolieri of Anghiari (1414–1486): priest and theologian, and member of the Florentine College of Theologians.

Della Torre, p. 770 *seq.*; Cosenza, pp. 184–5.

Oliviero di Taddeo Arduini (died 1498): distinguished Aristotelian philosopher who taught natural philosophy and theology at Pisa University (1474–1487). He took part in the Camaldolese dialogues described by Landino, and once had a discussion with Ficino on the soul. His writings have not survived.

Della Torre, pp. 743–5; Cosenza, pp. 265–6.

Giovanni Aurelio Augurelli (*c.* 1456–1524) of Rimini: poet and man of letters. Augurelli sent his poetry to Ficino who sang it to the lyre (see letter 93). He was also a friend of Bernardo Bembo and Poliziano. Aldo Manuzio edited his poetry in 1505. He wrote an allegorical poem on alchemy.

Della Torre, pp. 818–19; Sup. Fic. II, p. 336; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 4, pp. 578–81; Cosenza, pp. 331–3.

Francesco Bandini (*c.* 1440–1489): priest and diplomat who came from a wealthy family; was sent on many diplomatic missions by the Medici. His relationship with Ficino was very close and he belonged to Ficino's Academy. He was appointed master of the wine cup (architryclinus) at the Platonic Symposium, described by Ficino in *De Amore* (see also letter 107). Ficino dedicated his *Life of Plato* (Op. I, 763) to Bandini. In 1476 he was sent by Lorenzo to the court of King Matthias of Hungary and possibly stayed there till his death. Ficino continued to correspond with him and through him informed the King and the humanists of the work of the Academy.

Della Torre, p. 768 *seq*; Sup. Fic. I, p. 121; P. O. Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, pp. 395–435 and *passim*. Cosenza, pp. 388–9; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 5, pp. 709–10.

Gregorio di Piero Befani (1440–1499): called 'Epifanio' by Ficino. He was a priest and member of the Academy. He became a Canon of San Lorenzo in 1478.

Della Torre, p. 771; Cosenza, pp. 1291–2.

Bernardo Bembo (1433–1519): Venetian statesman and orator, father of Pietro Bembo. He was appointed Venetian ambassador to Florence in 1474; the friend of Lorenzo, Poliziano and Ficino, who dedicated the fifth Book of Letters to him. In Florence Bembo's platonic love for Ginevra de' Benci was celebrated in numerous poems of Braccesi. In Venice Bembo frequented the literary circle of Aldo Manuzio.

Della Torre, *La prima ambasceria di Bernardo Bembo a Firenze*, in 'Giornale Storico', XXXV (1900), p. 258 *seq.*; Sup. Fic. II, p. 346; Cosenza, pp. 489–90; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 8, p. 103 *seq.*

Amerigo Benci (born *c.* 1431): his father, Giovanni, and later Amerigo himself, managed the branches of the Medici banking business. Amerigo inherited his fortune and became the second richest man in Florence. He was a collector of classical manuscripts and works of art, and in 1462 presented Ficino with a fine manuscript of some of Plato's dialogues. He was a leading member of the Academy and patron of scholars and artists.

Leonardo da Vinci painted the famous portrait of his daughter, Ginevra, and left his unfinished painting of the 'Adoration of the Magi' at his house when he went to Milan.

Della Torre, p. 542; Cosenza, p. 502; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 8, p. 182.

Antonio di Paolo Benivieni (1443–1502): greatest Florentine physician of the second half of the 15th century and important for his studies in pathological anatomy. He was a member of Ficino's Academy and a friend of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici. He possessed an excellent library of philosophical and medical works, and was interested in astronomy and astrology. Both he and Ficino were consulted by Filipo Strozzi as to the right time and place for laying the foundation stone of the Strozzi Palace in 1481.

Della Torre, pp. 780–3; Cosenza, pp. 512–3; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 8, pp. 543–5.

Luca d'Antonio de' Bernardi of San Gimignano, one of Ficino's first teachers who taught him Latin (*c.* 1445–1451). He also taught him to play the lyre.

Della Torre, p. 489 *seq.*; Marcel, pp. 171–2.

Ioannos Bessarion (1403–1472): Cardinal of Sabina, he studied under Gemistos Plethon. He came to Italy in 1437 for the Council of Florence, where he championed the cause of union between the Greek and Latin churches. He was made a Cardinal by Pope Eugene IV and settled in Rome. One of the leading scholars of the time, many humanists including Platina and Valla gathered round him, and his house became known as the Academy of Bessarion. His collection of Greek manuscripts was the richest in Europe. Bessarion's work *In calumniatorem Platonis* published in 1469, made Plato known to a wide public and emphasized the harmony between Platonism and Christianity.

Della Torre, pp. 584–5; L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsman*, 3 vols., Paderborn, 1923; Marcel, p. 355 *seq.*; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 9, pp. 686–96.

Alessandro di Rinaldo Braccesi (1445–1503): poet, ambassador and Chancellor of the Republic. His poems beautifully express the platonic ideal of love, and in style are close to Petrarch. He revered Ficino, as is evident in a poem written when he was Chancellor.

Della Torre, p. 656; Sup. Fic. II, p. 338; *Carmina*, ed. A. Perosa, Florence, 1944; Cosenza, pp. 695–8; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 13, pp. 602–8.

Jacopo Bracciolini (1441–1478): son of Poggio, the famous humanist and Chancellor of Florence. A member of Ficino's Academy and Secretary of Cardinal Raffaele Riario. He took part in the Pazzi Conspiracy and was hanged.

Della Torre, p. 804; Sup. Fic. I, pp. 121–2; Cosenza, pp. 693–4; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 13, pp. 638–9.

Lorenzo Buonincontri of San Miniato (1411–1492): philosopher, astronomer and poet. He was a member of Ficino's Academy and a close friend of Lorenzo de' Medici. Ficino sought Buonincontri's advice on questions of astronomy. Buonincontri wrote many works on philosophy and astronomy, including an important commentary on Manilius's *Astronomicon*. He was also a soldier of fortune, and served in the army of Costanzo Sforza (1480).

Della Torre, pp. 681–7; Thorndike, IV, p. 405 *seq.*; Cosenza, p. 659 *seq.*

Giovanni Battista Buoninsegni (1453–*c.* 1512): statesman and scholar; a close friend of Poliziano and Lorenzo, and a member of Ficino's Academy. Ficino sent him his translations of Plato for comment. Ficino dedicated the first version of the first book of *De Vita Libri Tres* to Buoninsegni and Vespucci.

Della Torre, pp. 606, 731; Sup. Fic. I, p. 112; Cosenza, p. 663; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 15, pp. 255–6.

Antonio Calderini (1446–1494): lawyer and member of Ficino's Academy; an intimate friend of the Medici and Ficino. He was Secretary to Cardinal Barbo in Rome (1485–1491) and interceded on Ficino's behalf when the latter was accused of heresy after the publication of his *De Vita Libri Tres*.

Della Torre, pp. 713–4; Sup. Fic. I, p. 116; Cosenza, p. 768 *seq.*; Diz. Biog. Ital., vol. 16, pp. 592–3.

Andrea Cambini: historian and translator; friend of Ficino and Lorenzo di Bernardo de' Medici; he was a devoted student of Cicero.

Cosenza, p. 800.

Giovanni Antonio Campano (1427–1477): poet and scholar. He began life as a shepherd boy. He studied law at Perugia and became Professor of Rhetoric there (1455). Pope Pius II made him Bishop of Cotrone (1460), and afterwards Bishop of Teramo. In Rome Campano belonged to the Greek Academy of Bessarion, and for many years was corrector and reviewer of classical texts; Pius II submitted to him the manuscripts of his commentaries. He wrote many works, poetry, letters and fables. His teachers included Demetrius Chalcondylas and Lorenzo Valla.

In 1471, Campano passing through Florence heard Ficino playing on his lyre, which he describes in a letter to Gentile Becchi.

Della Torre, p. 415 *seq.*; Sup. Fic. I, pp. 132–3; Cosenza, pp. 808–13.

Francesco da Castiglione (died 1484): Theologian and Secretary to St. Antonino, Archbishop of Florence. A student of Vittorino da Feltre, he later occupied the Chair of Greek Literature. He became Dean of the College of Theologians in 1471. Ficino is said to have studied Greek under him.

Della Torre, p. 348 *seq.*; Sup. Fic. II, pp. 340–1; Cosenza, pp. 1483–4.

Giovanni Cavalcanti (1444–1509): son of a Florentine nobleman, he studied rhetoric under Landino and became a statesman and diplomat, going on an important mission to King Charles VIII of France in 1494. Ficino knew and loved Giovanni from the time when Giovanni was only seven years old. Ficino dedicated his translation of Alcinous and Speusippus to him in 1463 (see letter 51). In Cavalcanti's company Ficino wrote many of his works, such as the *Platonic Theology*. Cavalcanti remained devoted to Ficino all his life. When Ficino was afflicted with a 'bitterness of spirit' (Corsi VIII), Cavalcanti advised him to write a book on love as a remedy for his illness and to 'convert the lovers of transitory beauty to the enjoyment of eternal beauty'. This work became the first version of *De Amore*, the commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, which is dedicated to Cavalcanti.

Della Torre, p. 647 *seq.* & index; Sup. Fic. I, p. 118; Marcel, pp. 340–6 & index; Cosenza, pp. 951–3.

Benedetto Coluccio of Pistoia (born 1438): poet and orator, and member of Ficino's Academy. He was called to Florence in 1473 by Lorenzo de' Medici; from 1482–1499 he was Professor of Poetry and Rhetoric at Bologna University. He composed five orations calling for a crusade against the Turks which were delivered to the Academy.

Della Torre, pp. 706 *seq.*, 805 *seq.*; Sup. Fic. I, p. 115; A. Frugoni, *Scritti inediti di Benedetto Coluccio da Pistoia*, Florence, 1939; Marcel, pp. 395–7; Cosenza, pp. 1049–51.

Commando Commandi of Santo Stefano: one of Ficino's teachers (*c.* 1445–1451). He taught grammar at Florence University (1450–1452, 1457–1460).

Della Torre, p. 494; Marcel, p. 173.

Amerigo Corsini (1452–1501): poet and statesman who held important offices in the Republic. He was a member of Ficino's Academy. He wrote a life of Cosimo de' Medici in verse and a poem on Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres*.

L. Passerini, *Genealogia e Storia della famiglia Corsini*, Florence, 1858, p. 128 *seq.*; Della Torre, pp. 662–4; Sup. Fic. I, p. 113.

Migliore Cresci: poet and scholar. He was a member of the 'Chorus Academiae Florentinae' and friend of Donato Acciaiuoli. Ficino sent him his translation of some of Plato's dialogues asking him not to show them to anyone before he had corrected them. Ficino called him 'Academiae tutor'.

Della Torre, p. 542; Sup. Fic. II, p. 88; Cosenza, p. 1143.

Gregorio Epifanio: see Gregorio di Piero Befani.

Diotifeci d'Agnolo Ficino: (died *c.* 1477) father of Marsilio Ficino, doctor to Cosimo de' Medici. He specialised in surgery for which he became well known in Florence. Marsilio mentions his success in treating the plague in his *Consilio contro la pestilentia.* He was one of the speakers (Eryximachus) in the Symposium held in the Summer of 1468, which Ficino mentions in *De Amore.*

Della Torre, pp. 479–83; Marcel, pp. 122–7.

Alessandra di Nannoccio Ficino (1413–*c.* 1498): mother of Marsilio. Ficino lived with and cared for his mother until her death. He wrote a letter of consolation to his parents on the death of one of his brothers in 1462 (Sup. Fic. II, p. 162).

Della Torre, pp. 483–5; Marcel, pp. 127–30.

Bartolomeo della Fonte (1445–1513): Florentine priest, poet, and orator. He succeeded Francesco Filelfo (died 1481) as Professor of Rhetoric and Philosophy at Florence University, but was forced to resign because of the hostility of Poliziano. After teaching in Rome, he regained his position in 1485 with the help of Lorenzo de' Medici. For a time he taught at the court of King Matthias of Hungary, whose library he helped to enrich. He returned to Florence in 1490 on the death of the King.

Della Torre, p. 420 *seq.*; C. Marchesi, *Bartolomeo della Fonte*, Catania, 1900; Cosenza, pp. 1448–53; *Epistolae*, ed. L. Juhasz, Budapest, 1931.

Sebastiano Foresi (1424–1488): poet and musician much admired by Ficino for his ability in playing the lyre. He was a student of Virgil and dedicated to Lorenzo a book

on agriculture based on the *Georgics*. His poem *Il Trionfo delle Virtu* is also called *Il Trionfo di Cosimo de' Medici*.

Della Torre, pp. 792–3; Sup. Fic. I, p. 117.

Bartolomeo Fortini (died 1466): Florentine lawyer who held important offices in the Republic, a scholar in Greek and Latin and member of Ficino's Academy; a man of exemplary virtue, according to the *Lives* of Vespasiano da Bisticci.

Vespasiano, pp. 462–4; Della Torre, pp. 548, 550.

Matteo Franco (1447–1494): Court chaplain to the Medici. He was devoted to Clarice Orsini, wife of Lorenzo, and to her children. He was a wit and burlesque poet, a bitter rival of Luigi Pulci.

Sup. Fic. II, p. 344; Marcel, p. 424 *seq.*; Cosenza, p. 1494.

Domenico Galletti of Monte San Savino (near Arezzo): member of Ficino's Academy and Canon of Arezzo Cathedral. In 1466 he went to Rome as an apostolic secretary and abbreviator (providing summaries of documents). He was a friend both of Cavalcanti and Ficino.

Della Torre, pp. 767–8; Cosenza, p. 1532; P. O. Kristeller, *Iter Italicum*, II.

Bernardo Giugni: Florentine statesman, diplomat and member of Ficino's Academy; also a man of exemplary civic virtue, according to the *Lives* of Vespasiano da Bisticci.

Vespasiano, pp. 326–32; Della Torre, p. 545 *seq.*

Giovanni di Bartolomeo Guidi: lawyer and notary of the Signoria.

Cosenza, p. 1736.

Antonio di Guido: poet and musician, noted for his skill on the lyre.

Cristoforo Landino (1424–1504): Florentine poet, scholar and humanist, and member of Ficino's Academy. He shared with Ficino the duties of instructing the young Lorenzo. From 1458 he was Professor of Poetry and Rhetoric at Florence University, and Secretary to the Signoria until 1492. All his life Landino encouraged the study of the three great poets of Florence—Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. In 1481 he published an edition of the *Divine Comedy* with a commentary, and illustrations by Botticelli. He also wrote commentaries on Horace and Virgil said to influence poets and artists. Landino's most famous Latin work is the *Camaldolese Dialogues* of 1475 (see letter 119). Ficino dedicated his 'Institutiones ad Platonicam Disciplinam' to Landino. Landino expounded the speech of Aristophanes at the Platonic banquet held on 7th November, 1468 (described by Ficino in his Commentary on Plato's *Symposium*). His friends included Alberti and Bembo, and his pupils the Englishmen, William Grocyn and Thomas Linacre.

Della Torre, pp. 380 *seq.*, 579; Sup. Fic. II, pp. 327–8; Marcel, p. 190 *seq.* & index; Cosenza, pp. 1909–16; *Carmina Omnia*, ed. A. Perosa, 1939.

Francesco Lapaccino: Florentine cosmographer and scholar.

Vespasiano, pp. 429–30.

Lorenzo Lippi (1440–1485): poet and scholar, and Professor of Poetry and Rhetoric at the University of Pisa (1473–1485). Lippi was a close friend of the Medici and their circle of poets, and his *Book of Proverbs*, dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, contains nearly 100 Greek and Latin proverbs.

Della Torre, pp. 702–6; Cosenza, pp. 1994–5.

Angelo Manetti: son of the famous historian and Hebrew scholar Giannozzo. When a boy, Angelo could speak and write Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He possessed many manuscripts and was a friend of Lorenzo de' Medici.

Vespasiano, pp. 305–10; Cosenza, p. 2109.

Francesco Marescalchi of Ferrara: Canon and member of Ficino's Academy.

Della Torre, p. 600; Cosenza, pp. 1484–5.

Carlo Marsuppini, the younger: son of the famous chancellor and orator of Arezzo. He was a member of Ficino's Academy and one of the speakers (Agathon) in the Platonic banquet described in Ficino's Commentary on Plato's *Symposium*. He translated the first two books of Homer's *Iliad*. His poetry has not survived.

Della Torre, p. 658; Cosenza, p. 271.

Braccio Martelli (died 1492): diplomat and man of letters; friend of the Medici and their circle of poets. His teachers were Bernardo Nuzzi and Ugolino Verino. When he joined Ficino's Academy, the latter sent him a 'Concordance between Moses and Plato'.

Della Torre, pp. 729–30; Cosenza, p. 2206.

Cosimo de' Medici (1389–1464): statesman, banker, scholar, and patron of the arts. Cosimo as a man towers above the many functions which he so ably performed. Steadfast in good fortune and bad, quickly and wisely decisive, freely extending help to all who sought knowledge and understanding. He was blessed with the widest vision and with a spirit of philanthropy that effectively deployed his immense resources without any sign of diminution.

From 1429 Cosimo was head of a great banking house with interests all over Europe and the Orient; from 1433 an active and devoted collector of ancient manuscripts; and from 1434, the first citizen of Florence. Inspired by Gemistos Plethon with renewed enthusiasm for the study of Plato, Cosimo determined to establish a new Platonic Academy in Florence. To lead the Academy he chose Marsilio Ficino, entrusting him in 1462 with the translation and interpretation of the Platonic dialogues. Two years later, as he lay dying, Cosimo heard Ficino read to him the words of Xenocrates, a disciple of Plato, on the consolation of death. Thus, at the age of seventy-five, died a man exemplary in private and public affairs, the equal of the sovereigns of Europe, honoured as 'Pater Patriae'.

A. Fabroni, *Magni Cosmi Medicei Vita*, Pisa, 1789; Della Torre, p. 559 *seq.* & index; C. S. Gutkind, *Cosimo de Medici, Pater Patriae*, Oxford, 1940; Marcel, pp. 255–62 & index.

Giuliano de' Medici (1454–1478): younger brother of Lorenzo and member of Ficino's Academy. Botticelli painted his portrait and Poliziano celebrated his love for Simonetta Cattaneo in the *Giostra*. He was assassinated in the Pazzi Conspiracy.

He left an illegitimate son, Giulio, who became Pope Clement VII.

Della Torre, p. 737.

Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492): grandson of Cosimo and son of Piero. Lorenzo was

one of the most versatile and talented men of his time: perhaps the finest Italian poet of the century, he was equally accomplished in philosophic and religious poetry, love poetry and comic poetry. An eminent statesman, his principles, particularly his respect for justice, arose from his love of religion and philosophy. Ficino, his boyhood tutor, he always regarded as a close friend. Their friendship appears to have been strongest at the time these letters in Book I were written.

He was only 21 when he found himself the effective ruler of Florence. He was faced with enemies both in Florence and outside. The most critical period of his rule was that of the Pazzi conspiracy (1478) in which his brother Giuliano was assassinated in Florence Cathedral and he only narrowly escaped. After the conspiracy he was opposed by a powerful alliance of Italian states under the leadership of the Pope, which his courage and statesmanship brought to a satisfactory conclusion. After this, through his statesmanship and the respect in which he was held, Italy enjoyed a period of comparative peace until his death.

From his love of knowledge and the arts Lorenzo revitalized the University of Pisa, discerned the latent talent in Michelangelo, and supported that group of artists, sculptors, poets, scholars and philosophers who were close to the heart of the Renaissance.

A. Fabroni, *Laurentii Medicis magnifici vita*, Pisa, 1784; A. von Reumont, *Lorenzo de'Medici*, Leipzig, 1883, and London, 1876; Della Torre, pp. 737–42 & index; Marcel, p. 372 *seq.* & index; Cosenza, pp. 2272–5. See also bibliography.

Michele Mercati: together with Antonio Serafico, one of the earliest and closest friends of Ficino. He was a monk and teacher. Ficino sent him an early essay, *Summa Philosophiae*, summarising different schools of philosophy, to help him in his studies. Ficino also confided his ideas on Epicurean philosophy and his youthful commentary on Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* to Mercati (Sup. Fic. II, p. 81). A story is told, based upon the testimony of Mercati's grandson, that Ficino appeared after his death to Mercati in order to prove the immortality of the soul.

Della Torre, pp. 575–6; Sup. Fic. II, p. 216; Marcel, p. 184 *seq.* & index; Cosenza, p. 2291.

Niccolo di Michelozzo Michelozzi (1447–1527): son of the famous architect. This gentle scholar, poet and statesman was a close friend of the Medici; he was successively a secretary to Lorenzo, Piero, and his son, Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici. He was sent as ambassador to Milan in 1485 to induce the Sforzas to remain loyal to the Florentine Republic, and he helped negotiate a peace treaty between Florence and the King of Naples after the wars of the Pazzi Conspiracy. He was imprisoned when the Medici were exiled from Florence in 1494; on their return (November, 1512) he succeeded Machiavelli as Chancellor of Florence; when the Medici were again exiled (in 1527) he was deprived of office and died soon afterwards.

Michelozzi was a friend of Naldi, Della Fonte, and Poliziano who had been a secretary with him in the Chancery. Ficino loved Michelozzi for his manliness and honesty, and often addressed him as 'verus vir'.

Passerini, *Cenni intorno alla famiglia dei Michelozzi*, Florence, 1854; Della Torre, p. 716 *seq.*; Sup. Fic. II, p. 323; Cosenza, pp. 2311–13.

Naldo Naldi (*c.* 1435–1513): Professor of Poetry and Rhetoric at Florence University from 1484, and a member of Ficino's Academy. He was one of the most prolific poets of the Medici circle, and an intimate friend of Ficino who sent him the *De Christiana Religione*. Naldi praised Ficino in his poetry and once for a platonic symposium he rendered Ficino's *Life of Plato* into verse. He wrote religious and pastoral poetry, and love poems addressed to friends; three books of his Latin elegies were dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici.

Della Torre, pp. 503–5, 668 *seq.*; Sup. Fic. II, p. 328; Marcel, pp. 170–2; Cosenza, pp. 2408–11; *Elegiae*, ed. L. Juhasz, Leipzig, 1934.

Bernardo del Nero (1424–1497): uncle of Piero, famous statesman and man of letters; he held many public offices as head of the Medici party. After their expulsion from Florence he was beheaded. Both Bernardo and Piero were members of Ficino's Academy. In discussions with Ficino he sought to reconcile the teachings of Dante with Plato and together with Antonio Manetti prevailed upon Ficino to translate Dante's *De Monarchia* into Italian. He was a friend of Machiavelli and the principal speaker in Guicciardini's dialogue *On the Political Constitution of Florence* (*Del Reggimento di Firenze*). Bernardo represented the ideal platonic citizen to Ficino.

Della Torre, pp. 728–9; Sup. Fic. I, pp. 109–10; Marcel, pp. 329–31.

Piero del Nero (died 1512): held various offices in the magistrature. He financed the publication of Ficino's *De Sole et Lumine*.

Della Torre, pp. 727–8; Sup. Fic. I, p. 110; Cosenza, pp. 2431–2.

Angelo Niccolini (1444–1499): Florentine lawyer who held public offices: 'Priore' in 1479, 'Gonfaloniere' in 1489; ambassador to Pope Innocent VIII in 1484, and to King Charles VIII in 1494. Son of Ottone.

Passerini, *Genealogia e storia della famiglia Niccolini*, Florence, 1871, p. 45 *seq.*; Sup. Fic. I, p. 129.

Giovanni Niccolini (1449–1504): Florentine churchman and man of letters, the son of Ottone. He became Archbishop of Amalfi in 1475 and was made Patriarch of Athens in 1482.

Passerini, *supra*, p. 40 *seq.*; Della Torre, p. 574.

Ottone Niccolini: lawyer and member of the 'Chorus Academiae Florentinae' (an Aristotelian school). Niccolini once took part in a discussion with Argyropoulos and his pupils at Careggi in the presence of Cosimo de' Medici, the question being whether law was a branch of moral philosophy. Niccolini maintained that it was.

Vespasiano, p. 230; Passerini, *supra*, p. 37; Della Torre, pp. 398, 545 *seq.*

Bernardo Nuzzi: Secretary of the Chancery and member of Ficino's Academy. He took part in reading the Symposium at a banquet held on November 7th, 1468, in honour of Plato; the friend of Cavalcanti and Landino, he was Professor of Rhetoric and Poetry at Florence University and lectured on Horace's *Epistolae* and *Ars Poetica*.

Della Torre, pp. 702, 814; Sup. Fic. II, p. 348.

Matteo Palmieri (1406–1475): Florentine poet and historian. He held various public

offices in Florence after Cosimo de' Medici returned to power in 1434. He was a member of Ficino's Academy, and Ficino bestowed upon him the title 'poetus theologicus' for his long Italian poem, *La citta di vita* (*The City of Life*), inspired by Dante. He also wrote *Della vita civile* and *Opus de temporibus suis*, a history from the beginning of the world to his own time. His teachers were Ambrogio Traversari and Carlo Marsuppini the elder. He was an exponent of humanist education and expressed the humanist concern to fuse the active and contemplative life.

Della Torre, p. 492; Cosenza, pp. 2560–3.

Girolamo Pasqualini: scholar who possibly translated into Italian the passage from Marsuppini's *Rerum sui tempore gestarum*, which describes the Aristotelian School of Manuel Chrysoloras, the Greek scholar invited in 1396 to teach at Florence, and the progress of some of the School's pupils.

Cosenza, p. 2620.

Piero de' Pazzi of Florence (died 1464): created an 'Eques' (Knight) in 1462, and was 'Gonfaloniere di Giustizia'. From a life of idleness he was won over to the study of the classics by Niccolo Niccoli, and he built up a fine library of manuscripts. He was a member of the Aristotelian 'Chorus Academiae Florentinae' and later of Ficino's Academy.

Vespasiano, pp. 310–16; Della Torre, p. 545 *seq.*

Antonio Pelotti: poet and friend of the Medici. Ficino called him 'Apollineus Academiae nostrae lepos'.

Della Torre, pp. 659–62.

Leonardo Perugino (Leonardo Mansueti of Perugia) (died 1480): a Dominican who became General of his Order in 1474.

Della Torre, p. 767; Sup. Fic. I, p. 125; Marcel, pp. 416–17.

Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini of Siena (1429–1503): nephew of Pope Pius II (Enea Silvio Piccolomini). He was made Cardinal of Siena in 1460; elected Pope in September 1503. He was a man of learning and piety with whom Ficino frequently corresponded and to whom Ficino dedicated his commentary on Plato's *Symposium* (*De Amore*).

Sup. Fic. I, pp. 131–2; Marcel, pp. 415–16; Cosenza, pp. 2823–4.

Lorenzo da Pisa (*c.* 1391–1470): priest who had extensive knowledge of Greek and Latin. He wrote many theological works. He was made a Canon of San Lorenzo in 1428.

Moreni, *Continuazione delle Memorie Istoriche della Basilica di S. Lorenzo*, II, p. 192 *seq.*; Sup. Fic. II, p. 349; Cosenza, p. 1950.

Angelo Poliziano of Montepulciano (1454–1494): eminent in the Medicean circle of poets and one of the greatest of classical scholars. He was in contact with all the leading humanists and statesmen of his day and his many writings cover a very wide range of subjects. He was a friend of Landino. Supported by Lorenzo (see letter 17), to whom he dedicated his Latin version of Homer's *Iliad* in 1472, he was proclaimed the finest poet in Greek and Latin that Italy had produced; but he also wrote important work in Italian.

Poliziano became tutor to Lorenzo's children but relinquished the post after disagreements with Lorenzo's wife. He became Professor of Greek and Latin in 1480. He wrote odes, elegies and epigrams, the *Orfeo* and *Stanze per la Giostra del Magnifico Giuliano de' Medici*. His pupils included the Englishmen William Latimer and Thomas Linacre.

Poliziano, Opera, Venice 1498; *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche di A. Poliziano*, ed. Del Lungo, Florence, 1867; *Le stanze, l'orfeo e le rime*, ed. Carducci, Florence, 1863; Della Torre, pp. 657–8; Cosenza, pp. 2878–96.

Bernardo Pulci (1438–1488): poet and younger brother of Luigi Pulci, who in his well-known poem *Morgante* had lampooned the Academy and Ficino. For Ficino's reaction to Luigi see letters 113 and 114. Bernardo wrote religious poems.

Della Torre, pp. 820–9; Sup. Fic. I, p. 117; Marcel, pp. 420–33; Cosenza, pp. 2970–2.

Cherubino Quarquagli of San Gimignano: grammarian, musician and poet. He was an early member of Ficino's Academy. Later he was in Rome in the service of Cosimo Orsini, the Apostolic Secretary, but continued to correspond with Ficino.

Della Torre, pp. 795–6; Sup. Fic. I, p. 118; Cosenza, pp. 2978–9.

Piero Riario (died 1474): Cardinal of Pisa, he was the nephew of Francesco della Rovere, Pope Sixtus IV.

Cosenza, p. 3036.

Bindaccio Ricasoli (*c.* 1444–1524): member of Ficino's Academy. He held various public offices in Florence, and compiled a catalogue of the works of Ficino in 1493. He was a friend of Giovanni Corsi, who wrote the earliest life of Ficino.

Passerini, *Genealogia e storia della famiglia Ricasoli*, Florence 1861, p. 155; Della Torre, pp. 59–60; Marcel, pp. 18–20; Cosenza, pp. 604–5.

Girolamo Rossi of Pistoia: a Dominican and member of Ficino's Academy. Ficino sent him his *De Christiana Religione* and dedicated to him the twelfth book of his letters, as well as his collected letters, which were printed at Rossi's expense in 1495.

Della Torre, pp. 639–40, 769 *seq.*

Bernardo Rucellai (1448–1514): statesman, humanist, and historian. After the death of Lorenzo and Ficino, the Platonic Academy was invited to meet in his garden (Orti) which came to be known as 'Orti Oricellarii'. Bernardo married a sister of Lorenzo, and was a great friend of the Medici family and also of Luigi Pulci.

Passerini, *Genealogia e storia della famiglia Rucellai*, Florence, 1861, p. 122 *seq.*; Della Torre, p. 824; Marcel, pp. 427–8; Cosenza, pp. 2513–14.

Francesco Salviati: created Archbishop of Pisa by Pope Sixtus IV in October 1474. Because Lorenzo de' Medici opposed the appointment, Salviati took office only in 1477. He was executed in 1478 for the leading part he played in the Pazzi Conspiracy against the Medici.

Sup. Fic. I, p. 121; Cosenza, p. 3158.

Sebastiano Salvini of Castel San Niccoli: Ficino's nephew, priest and doctor of theology. He copied out and arranged Ficino's letters in order. When Ficino was invited in 1482

to go to Hungary by King Matthias to expound Plato's philosophy, he declined the invitation and tried unsuccessfully to induce Salvini to go instead.

Della Torre, pp. 94–104; Sup. Fic. II, p. 332; Cosenza, pp. 3164–5.

Bartolomeo Scala (1428–1497): statesman, ambassador and historian. Son of a miller, as a young man he came to Florence and became the protégé of Cosimo de' Medici; he was Secretary of Florence and 'Gonfaloniere' in 1486. Pope Innocent VIII made him a Knight of the Golden Spur. He was one of those to whom Ficino submitted his Latin translation of Plato's *Symposium* before publishing it. He wrote a history of Florence, and presented to Lorenzo a collection of verse and prose in praise of Cosimo.

Sup. Fic. I, p. 128; Cosenza, pp. 3210–12.

Antonio Serafico (Morali) of San Miniato (born c. 1433): one of the earliest and closest friends of Ficino; poet, musician and one of the first members of Ficino's Academy. He was an expert lyre player. Ficino dedicated an early essay on vision to him.

Della Torre, pp. 793–4; P. O. Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, p. 139 *seq.*; Marcel, pp. 224–9.

Francesco Soderini (1453–1524): son of Tommaso, he came of a distinguished Florentine family; a humanist and diplomat, he was professor of law at Pisa University, Bishop of Volterra, and Ambassador to Pope Sixtus IV from 1480. He defended Ficino against a charge of heresy following the publication of *De Vita Libri Tres.*

Sup. Fic. I, pp. 127–8.

Paolo Antonio Soderini (1448–1499): elder brother of Piero and Francesco; a distinguished statesman, and Rector of Florence University in 1474. He was later a follower of Savonarola.

Della Torre, pp. 714 *seq.*, 726; Sup. Fic. I, p. 128.

Piero di Tommaso Soderini (1452–1522): 'Gonfaloniere' and principal ruler of Florence 1502–1512.

Della Torre, p. 726.

Sigismondo Stufa: man of letters. He was engaged to Albiera degli Albizzi who died on July 14th, 1473, the eve of her wedding day. This misfortune elicited letters and poems from Poliziano, Francesco da Castiglione and many other friends. He became 'Gonfaloniere'.

Sup. Fic. II, p. 341; Cosenza, p. 3346.

Bartolo Tedaldi: scholar who frequented Roberto de' Rossi's school of Greek and Latin in the company of many famous men, including Cosimo de' Medici.

Vespasiano, p. 405.

Francesco Tedaldi: father of Lattanzio, he was an Aristotelian philosopher who dedicated his *Disputationes Occidentalium Philosophorum de Anima* to Lorenzo de' Medici.

Sup. Fic. II, p. 339.

Niccolo Tignosi da Foligno (1402–1474): Professor of Logic at Bologna until 1439. Practised medicine in Arezzo 1439–51; taught philosophy and theoretical medicine at

Florence University from 1451. Tignosi was Ficino's teacher, 1451–56. He wrote a commentary on the *Ethica* and *De Anima* of Aristotle. He was a close friend of Carlo Marsuppini and Poggio Bracciolini.

Della Torre, pp. 495–500; L. Thorndike, *Science and Thought in the 15th Century*, New York, 1929; Marcel, pp. 174–84; Cosenza, pp. 3408–9.

Baccio di Luca Ugolini (died 1494): poet and musician, skilled on the lyre ('improvvisatore'). The friend of Poliziano and Lorenzo; he attended the first lessons of Ficino, who held Baccio in warm regard on account of their common love for poetry and music. Ugolini played the role of Orpheus, when the play of that name written by Poliziano was given its first performance in Mantua. He was made Bishop of Gaeta in 1494.

Della Torre, p. 796 *seq.*; Sup. Fic. I, pp. 119–20; Cosenza, pp. 3506–7.

Tommaso Valeri of Viterbo: physician.

Della Torre, p. 779 & index.

Carlo Valgulio of Brescia: Scholar and tutor to the sons of Tommaso Minerbetti; Secretary of Cardinal Cesare Borgia and friend of Poliziano and of Cardinal Piccolomini of Siena.

Sup. Fic. I, pp. 114–15.

Ugolini Verino (1438–1516): poet, who was a member of Ficino's Academy. A pupil of Landino, he attempted to reconcile Platonism with Christianity. Later he became a priest and wrote purely religious poems.

Della Torre, pp. 687–91; Cosenza, pp. 3621–5.

Giorgio Antonio Vespucci (1435–1514): priest and Canon of Florence Cathedral, he was an early member of Ficino's Academy, and became an eminent tutor of the classics. He built up a rich library of Greek and Latin manuscripts. Ficino gave Vespucci his Latin translation of Plato to revise. He was an uncle of the navigator and explorer, Amerigo Vespucci (after whom America is named).

Bandini, *Vita e lettere di Amerigo Vespucci*, Florence, 1745; Della Torre, pp. 772–4; Sup. Fic. I, pp. 111–12; Cosenza, pp. 3654–5.

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